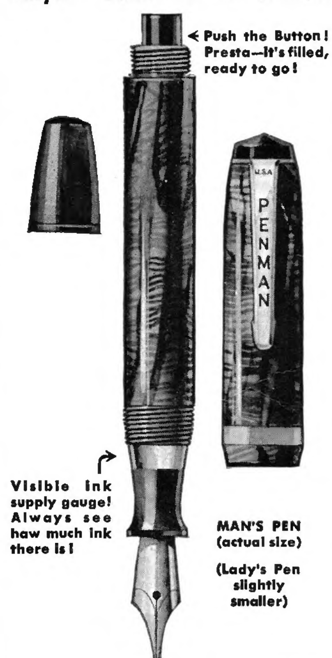

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DECEITFUL WIFE
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JO ANN SAYERS
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# Real Story Contents

FOR
FEBRUARY, 1942
VOL. I NO. 4



Jo Ann Sayres, star of "My Sister Eileen"
PHOTO BY KORMAN

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**ALL STORIES TRUE**
**ALL STORIES COMPLETE**

MARY ROLLINS
Editor

BOB BECKER
Art Director

*When a boy and girl take love too soon, isn't heartache bound to follow?*

# OUR KISSES LED TO

"IT'S all right because we love each other. We're engaged, darling. If you really loved me you couldn't refuse me!"

How many girls have listened, as I did and believed those words? How many more will hear them and think that happiness lies that way?

It seems a lifetime since I was eighteen although I am only twenty now. I never want to think of those two years again, but I am going back through all the pain and suffering, hoping, praying that I can make other girls say, "I won't let that happen to me."

We lived—Mama, Papa, my sister Teresa and I—in a shabby comfortable house on Eighth Street. Teresa was six years older than I was. I can remember those nights when Papa and Mama and I crowded into the dining room while Teresa entertained her young man in the parlor. Papa would smoke and read the paper after his day in the upholstery shop. He was always strict with Teresa. "She's a fine girl," he would say. "I want to know the boys she goes with."

It was not long before Christmas, the year I was fourteen, that Teresa came home one night from the office where she worked, carrying a big box. "I've bought a new dress, Mama," she said, "for my date with Tony."

Teresa rushed from the table to get ready. It seemed like hours to me before Teresa came downstairs again.

Then, suddenly she was standing in the room. How wonderful she looked! The dress was ice-blue satin, very long, fitted tight over her curving figure.

"How do you like it?" Teresa asked breathlessly.

Papa glanced up from his newspaper, then jumped to his feet angrily. He grabbed Teresa so hard by her wrists she fell to her knees.

"Take it off!" he shouted. "What do you think you are? No girl of mine goes out in a dress like that!"

For a long stunned second Teresa looked up at him, then she burst into tears, and ran up the stairs.

After that she was different with Papa and Mama. She didn't talk about her dates with Tony at the supper table any more. But lots of times when I watched her dress for the evening, she would talk to me.

"Tony loves me," she would say. "As soon as he is making more money we'll be married. I'll be so happy then, Dolores—so happy."

And then, I came in to supper one night and found Teresa and Mama and Papa in the living room.

"Two years you've been going with him," Papa shouted. "Two years, and no word of marriage! There will be talk."

"Hush, Angelo," Mama said. "Tony will ask her soon."

"A week I'll give them," Papa yelled. "Then Tony speaks or Teresa does not go out with him again."

Teresa was sobbing so that she could hardly talk. "Papa—I can't ask him—"

"A week," Papa said. Teresa turned and hurried past me up the stairs. Mama saw me then.

"See what you have done," she said. "You've frightened Dolores."


There was a blinding flash, then Papa was gasping and clutching at me convulsively.

# TRAGEDY

"It's good for her to hear," Papa said. "She'll not make the same mistake."

But it was not fear; it was cold fury that had possession of me.

I ran upstairs. Teresa was lying across her bed.

"Don't you care, Teresa," I said. "You can marry Tony, and then Papa can't say what you're to do any more."

She sat up and pressed her face against mine and her tears wet my cheek. "I'm afraid of Papa," she whispered brokenly. "He will drive Tony away."

"But Tony loves you," I said.

"Yes. But men are funny, Dolores. They don't like to be told what to do."

I will never forget that week. Every night Papa would ask Teresa if she had spoken to Tony. It was on the last day that Teresa came to supper late. Her eyes were huge in her white face and she trembled as she walked to where Papa was sitting. "I hope you are satisfied," she said dully. "I told Tony what you said. He said he wanted to be head of his home. He will not marry a girl whose father will run his house."

Papa's face got red. He stood up. "He is impertinent!" he shouted. "A man has the right to control his daughters. You will marry a young man who appreciates a girl who is protected!"

Teresa shook her head. "I will never marry," she said. "You've driven Tony away. I'll never love anyone else and I'll never forgive you."

Mama put her arms around Teresa. "Don't look like that," she said. "Your Papa loves you. He is right."

Teresa drew away. "Tomorrow my vacation starts. Don't ever mention Tony's name."

**"Carl," I said, scarcely above a whisper, "we must marry right away."**

When her two weeks' vacation was over, Teresa came home. I hardly knew her. Her face was pale and there were huge dark circles under her eyes.

I loved her and it hurt me to see the change in her. But even then I told myself Teresa had been silly to let



Papa scare her into losing Tony. Papa would never make me do anything like that.

I was sixteen when I was asked for my first real date. Alfred Carillo asked me to go with him to a school dance and I was thrilled. I could not keep from telling Teresa about it when she came home.

At the supper table she turned to Papa. "Don't you think Dolores is too young to start dating?" she asked.

I stared at her. I couldn't believe she would do a thing like that. She was watching me, her eyes glittery. I realized for the first time that she was jealous of me. But why should Teresa want to spoil my fun?"

And then I remembered how long it was since she had had a date. She had turned down invitations from boys time and again. And I suppose they got tired of asking her.

Papa was looking at me. "What is this about a date, Dolores?" he demanded. "Your sister is right, you are too young."

I begged and pleaded, but he refused to let me go. And from then on Teresa and I grew farther and farther apart. Whenever I had a date I kept quiet about it.

One night I went with a boy to get a soda after a movie and Teresa was in the drugstore buying a magazine. She saw me and came to the booth where we were sitting. I had to introduce her to the boy.

Teresa nodded to him, then turned to me. "It is late for you to be out, Dolores. You'd better come home now."

I felt my face get hot. I started to argue, but I didn't want a scene. So I said good night to the boy and left with her.

Outside she turned to me. "I didn't go with boys when I was sixteen. Why should you? Anyway, you told Papa you were going with Rosa and Tina," she said accusingly.

"Teresa, please don't tell him!" I begged, but she did not answer.

When we got home, Teresa went to Papa. "I found Dolores with a boy in the drugstore," she said. "I brought her home."

Papa stood up. "Go to your room!" he shouted.

"Papa, please—" I began, then ran to my room.

Soon I heard him coming. He opened my bedroom door and closed it behind him. "Come here, Dolores," he said.

I started to tremble. I wasn't a child any longer. Papa couldn't punish (*Continued on page* 54)



**"You won't go out dressed like that!" Papa shouted.**

# DECEITFUL WIFE

WHEN you say you never had a chance, people figure it's an excuse for failure. You can make your own chances. Well, kids can't. They have to take what's handed to them. I know because I was one of those kids.

When my chance came, I snatched it like the street urchin I was, not thinking what I might be doing to others, especially the man I loved better than life itself.

I don't remember my mother. She died when I was two weeks old. My father, Lars Anson, I remember too well. A hard-drinking, rough-spoken man, he was a stevedore on the Delaware River docks near Chester. He wasn't always like that, as I can see from his wedding picture.

He was big, and blond and thick-shouldered, with the clean scrubbed look young Swedes have. Mama was small and dark like me.

My brother and sister, Pete and Lorna, remember the nice little house where I was born. They remember, too, that mama named me Jewel because my eyes were so blue. But after I came everything changed. Mama was gone and there were three babies to look after, with Pete, the eldest, only four.

Soon Papa married Martha, a big heavy-handed woman with a daughter of her own, Katie, who was Lorna's age. She always hated Lorna and me because we were pretty and she wasn't. My earliest recollections are of quarrels, quarrels with Katie, quarrels between Martha and Papa over the children, and worst of all, the awful drunken fights in the night between my father and his wife.

At first the police came but finally we lived in neighborhoods where brawls were the accepted thing. Katie and Lorna got used to them. Pete and I never did. As Pete got older, the fear deepened in his eyes, and there was an uncertain quiver to his lower lip. I tried not to see it, tried to believe he was strong and courageous and ambitious, because he was all that was good in my life.

By that time, Pete was sixteen, Lorna fourteen and I, twelve. Lorna, blonde, small, bold, was tired of school. She ran out every chance she got and roamed the waterfront. Pete and I would go hunting her, peer into saloons where sailors hung out. Time and again we brought her back, sullen-eyed and resentful.

Then one night we couldn't find her. The next day a policewoman brought her from Philadelphia. Martha beat her and that night she ran away for good. She was fifteen. I cried for days and Pete tried to comfort me.

"She'll make out in her own way," he said. "Such things don't seem bad to some girls. Only you couldn't be like that, Jewel. You're like mama. She was good."

We were sitting on the broken-down back step. I pressed close to his arm. "Pete, why don't you get a steady job and save your money. When I'm through school, we could go away. I could keep house better than Martha."



**His arms tightened about me. "Jewel," he said huskily, "I want to marry you."**



**As the police were coming down the hall, Ty grabbed me, swung me to the ground.**

Pete's voice was bitter. "A job? What can I do?"

"Things are picking up," I encouraged. It was 1937. "Papa's working almost steady. You've had two years of high school. Maybe that fellow where you worked last summer—"

"Oh, him! He don't like me."

My heart sank. Nobody liked him, everybody picked on him, according to Pete. I blinked back the tears, spoke with almost desperate optimism: "Things will be better next year."

But things weren't better that year—for us—nor the three that followed while I struggled through high school and Papa cursed the law that required a girl to go to school until she was sixteen. Certainly only the law kept me in school. I liked the studies but the rest was torture—being pretty and not making friends nor having dates. I didn't dare. No one must see my home or know my people.

Except for the comfort of his presence, Pete was no help. He drifted from job to job, always making enemies. My hope then was to finish school, get a job and help him! Years crawl so slowly but they move and at last I was sixteen and a senior in high school.

THOUGH it was only last year, it seems a century since that day I came home and saw the big man standing in the kitchen, and Martha said he was Nick, Katie's husband.

His look was swift and hot as a hand on my flesh. His voice, a harsh frightening boom: "Katie's sister, heh? Haven't you got a kiss for your brother?"

Katie came in the room swiftly. "Lay off that stuff! And you,"—to me—"make yourself scarce."

If only I could, but it seemed everywhere I turned, there was Nick. He didn't work half the time and plainly he married Katie only because "he had to." They quarreled and made up with equal violence until in our thin-walled, crowded house, I didn't know which was worse—their quarrels or their love-making.

Soon I found the quarrels were worse for me because then Nick turned his atten-

tion my way. Those winter months were a nightmare. I was afraid to go through the hall, to go upstairs, to sleep unless Pete was in his room next to mine. Pete was my one defense. He was no match physically for Nick, but Katie's husband wanted no witnesses to his prowling.

One bright spot came at Christmas when I got a gift from Lorna—a beautiful silk nightie. With it was a note with a Wilmington address: *"Doing all right. If things get too tough, come down. Your loving sister, Lorna."*

I treasured that gift and message like a ray of hope, a chance of escape if things got too black. But I was hanging on desperately, trying to finish school. I almost hoped I could make it when in March, Pete's number came up in the draft.

For days he prowled around, nervous as a cat, insisting almost desperately he wouldn't pass the physical. I hid my own panic to cheer him.

He was afraid—I could see it so plainly. Not of fighting and bullets and death, but of people, of discipline, of cooperation. His face was gray that morning he went down for his physical—unbelievably white when he came back. He had passed!

When he was shipped South the next week, I went to the train with him. He was too busy grieving over his imagined misfortune to remember how much I needed him. With Pete gone I knew I had lost my last friend.

How completely, I learned that very night. I woke from a fitful, dream-torn sleep to see Nick standing in the room. Leaping up, I beat at him with both fists. But his hairy arms crushed me to him, his wide-lipped mouth stifled the cries that crowded my throat.

Then through the pinwheels of fire that dance before my eyes, I saw another light and, framed in the door, awkward and heavy, stood Katie. She rushed at me, screaming accusations and terrible names. Nick dropped me so that I almost fell.

"He broke the lock on the door. You can see—"

"Sure," Katie sobbed wildly, "so you run to him like a mouse . . . steal your sister's husband and her having a baby."

Her hysterical cries brought Martha and Papa. I don't want to remember all the shame, the bitter words, the injustice of it. All of them screaming at me, not one word to Nick. Next morning I packed my pitifully few things and thumbed a ride to Wilmington. Maybe Lorna could get me a job. I was almost seventeen, pretty and with a good figure.

THE address Lorna had given me was a big brick house in a run-down neighborhood. A slovenly girl opened the door. At my question, she signalled me into the hall. Inside, the house was a surprise with polished floors, pictures, deep divans and big mirrors.

I heard her calling Lorna's name, then there was a click of heels on the stairs and I shut my eyes, afraid to look, afraid of the reception I'd get from this sister I hadn't seen in four years. Her glad cry was sweeter than music.

"Jewel! It's not—it can't be. Oh, honey!"

I dared look then as Lorna rushed at me, arms outstretched. She'd changed. Her hair was harshly yellow, when it had once been pale gold. She was plump and looked much older than nineteen.

"Oh, baby, you're beautiful," she kept saying as she took me up to her room. There under the soft lights she studied me. "Can I fix you up! A good hair-do, a dress to set off that figure with the right color for your skin . . ."

"You mean I can stay? There's work I can do?"

"I should say so. We're crazy to get girls." She stopped suddenly, stared at me, looking half-frightened, then her voice was hard and cold as hail stones. "You



**"You've killed him, Ty," I cried out. "You've killed him!"**

really want to, don't you? That's why you came?"

"Of course it's why I came," I said vaguely. "But I had to."

I told her the whole story of things at home but I could see she was only half-listening. Then she got a comb and started on my hair.

"I want you to look cute when Daisy sees you," she explained, "but she'll take you on. We need girls."

Daisy, I found, was a big-bosomed, deep-voiced woman who owned the house. "You'll like it here," she said. "It's easy. You only have to be nice to the boys. We give parties every night. Ten girls in the house and another dozen on call. Each boy pays ten dollars but it's a party, see? Liquor, food, fun, all on the house."

Her hard bright eyes winked knowingly and I gave a doubtful smile while Daisy went on: "Nobody has anything on us. It's all a party. And what's ten dollars to those fellows? They're making plenty. Just be nice to 'em."

Nice! The word echoed in my mind as I spent my first afternoon in a beauty shop. Then Lorna bought me a dark blue net evening dress, cut very low—too





low. It had a cute brocade fitted jacket, and I made up my mind I'd always wear it with the dress!

**"Be nice," Slim sneered, "or I might tell Ty about your jailbird sister!"**

I guess I was dumb but I was so happy. I trusted Lorna. She was my sister. I never thought of Pete saying: *"Things don't seem bad to some girls."* Not then, I didn't remember it.

I did protest when we dressed and Lorna said not to wear anything underneath except a tiny pair of panties. But I was so much lovelier and happier than I'd ever been in my life, I figured I just didn't know about things, and kept quiet. Then ten of us went down the stairs together and Daisy's big voice boomed: "The hostesses."

Instantly a dozen fellows swarmed around us. A big fellow grabbed me, held me too tight as a phonograph blared. Suddenly I was frightened. I looked for Lorna but she was dancing, close in some man's arms. She didn't see me—or anyone.

The big fellow held me tighter, muttered in my ear. I didn't understand. I tried to pull away and he was mad. Then more girls came and he grabbed a newcomer. Gratefully I backed out the door. I didn't like this party. I wanted to get away. Something was wrong here. I saw it in the dances, felt it in the heavy, hot air of the room.

I wanted air—lots of cold fresh air. I reached the hall then stopped as two fellows came in. A short, red-headed boy with wise green eyes and behind him, towered a fellow over six feet, thick-shouldered, with brown hair and a large pleasant face. Looking at him was like getting that breath of air I wanted.

He looked at me and smiled, a wide smile that showed strong even teeth. The little red-headed guy caught my hand but the big fellow brushed him away, as though he weren't there.

"Might I have this dance, (*Continued on page* 58)

# I FOUND LOVE TOO LATE



"That'll teach you," he growled. "Get up and stop your whimpering. Hereafter, don't leave camp!"

## Can a girl ever live down the black shadows of a wretched marriage?

THE hottest day so far that summer! Tom's Tourist camp baked in the glare, seven little cabins flung down in a half circle in the middle of a stretch of dusty oil-stained grass.

From the cabin nearest the road, the cabin that housed the lunchroom, and the bedroom where Tom and I slept, I could see the lake, sparkling cool through the trees.

On sudden impulse, I jerked my wilted house dress over my head, and kicked it resentfully into a corner, while I dug into the depths of the trunk I'd brought with me from New York. I found the creamy satin lastex swimming suit I'd worn the year before and slipped it on.

Tom didn't look up when I stepped out into the lunchroom. The two truck drivers at the counter saw me first, looked up quickly from their plates, and let their eyes linger appreciatively on my slim figure. Tom spun around as his eyes followed theirs.

"Keep your eyes to yourself!" he roared rudely at the truckmen, as he shoved me hastily back into the room.

"What do you mean, coming out there like that in front of those guys?" he demanded fiercely, slamming the door behind him. It was mercilessly hot in that close little room, but he drew me close.

"Let me go, Tom," I protested. His arms only tightened around me. "You're mine—mine!" he muttered, before he suddenly released me and pushed me away. "Get some clothes on you!" he directed, and went back to the counter.

What else could I do? I sponged my face and shoulders with water from the pitcher, pulled on a fresh house dress—ran a comb through the loose waves of my hair, hanging so hot and heavy at the back of my neck. Tom wouldn't let me out of his sight long enough to get my hair trimmed, even if he could have spared the money.

For a long time, I stood at the back door, but there was no breath of air stirring. I couldn't defy Tom. He was too strong-willed, too violent. Standing there alone, helpless, unhappy, I shivered and the awful trapped feeling I'd known that summer closed around me again!

The three girls who'd taken the farthest cabin that morning tumbled out of their front door in swimming suits. As I enviously watched them, Tom's big voice boomed out.

"Marylin! You haven't done up all the cabins yet," he shouted. And so I gathered up fresh sheets and towels and started out into the broiling sun.

It must have been an hour before I had it fit to live in again. On my way back to the lunchroom, the three girls passed me, cool and dripping from their swim.

I stepped off the hot gravel path to let them go by. The tall blonde one hesitated, and I thought she was going to speak. But she only looked at me almost pityingly as I stood there with my arms full of mussy sheets.



**"Let me go, Tom!" I cried, but he drew me closer.**

Their talk floated back to me as they went on to their cabin. "She's a pretty little thing, really! How do you suppose she ever landed in this ratty little camp?"

"The big roughneck that runs it is her husband, I guess."

"She looked half-melted, standing there. I'm going to ask her to come with us for a dip, this evening."

Talking about me! Pitying me! I could feel the hot shamed color in my face. Tom roared my name just then. "Scour the coffee urn, Marylin," he demanded crossly, dropping listlessly into a chair by the lunchroom door. "Where have you been anyway?"

I didn't answer as I caught up the tea kettle, boiling away on the hot part of the stove, and emptied it into the big nickel urn. Steam rolled up around my face.

"It's so hot, Tom," I said. "And if those girls go down to the lake tonight, I'm going with them! I can't stand the heat much longer. I'll clean up the lunchroom after dinner—and then—oh, Tom, I haven't been swimming this summer!"

"Swimming!" he burst out. "That's a laugh. A lot you care about swimming! You just want to get into that slick suit of yours, and strut around."

"That's a lie, Tom," I flung the words at him. "All I want is to get cool, and I'm going no matter what you say."

He laughed ironically, and strode past me into the bedroom. When he came back he had my bathing suit in his hands. I wailed a protest as he flung open the stove door, but I might as well have kept still. I had to watch while the creamy satin blackened and dropped apart on the hot coals.



**His mouth found mine, and I clung to him, almost desperately.**

ALONE in the bedroom at last, I clenched my teeth on the furious sobs that shook me. How had I ever thought I loved Tom? What cruel trick had my heart played on me that awful summer in New York. I'd hated the city. Hated my job. The main floor of the store where I worked was air conditioned—but not the basement where I sold yard goods. Hot artificial light, bargain hunting throngs—do you blame me that I longed unendingly for the small town where I'd grown up, for trees and flowers and smooth green lawns. Escape, that's what I prayed for, and dreamed my hopeless little dreams of a home of my own, a house where I'd live with love. But oh, how could I ever have thought Tom was the one to make that dream come true?

Ralph had brought him into the drugstore where Nadine and I were waiting, and I'd known as he came toward the booth where we sat that he wasn't a city man. Not with that sunburned skin. Even the business suit he wore gave him away. It was so obvious he'd have been more comfortable in easy old country tweeds.

His blue eyes were on me from the first, and he hardly waited for introductions before he seized my arm and led me out of the store, away from the others.

"I don't like to see girls like you sitting around in public places with a lot of loafers giving them the eye," he began. "Come on—we'll go for a ride."

Funny how you can be with a person without actually seeing him. I looked at Tom that night, as we drove up along the river, and saw—not the real Tom—but my own dream, walking and talking. His sturdy shoulder

so close to mine seemed dependable, and when he slipped his arm around me and drew me close, my pulses fluttered.

Oh, I know now it was my own silly heart, catching at straws, that made me think I loved him. But when he told me about his tourist camp on the lake, about the wooded island, where his family lived—well, it all took shape as part of my dream. I didn't know then how shabby the camp was, or that Tom's family never spoke to him or allowed him on the island.

With an unbelieving joy, I heard him tell me that he loved me, that he'd loved me the moment he laid eyes on me. Before he left the city, he promised to come back for me at the end of the summer.

The hills were a glory of color on that wedding journey of ours, and even the first sight of the run-down camp didn't shock me into realization of what I'd done. I could be happy anywhere with him. I was—at first . . . until I realized that desire was all of love to Tom. Companionship, understanding, he neither asked or gave.

All that Winter and Spring I'd tried to make the best of it. To love Tom. To help him. To be a loyal wife. I'd never sought desperately for a way out, until that day when he burned my swimming suit. Vainly, I let my thoughts beat at the bonds that held me! I had no money, Tom had little enough and he took care of it himself. I had no family to turn to. Even if I could bum a ride to town with one of the truck drivers —what could I live on until I found work? I cried that day till I was weak, and only got up from my bed to splash cold water across my tear-reddened eyes when I heard



**"Don't — don't, Tom!" I begged frantically. "I'll go back with you, Tom. I'll do anything you say!"**

the screen door bang, and the three girls come into the lunchroom.

"We want your wife to go swimming with us this evening," I heard one of them say to Tom. I heard his short answer, "Not tonight! I've got business in town. She'll have to watch the place."

Business in town! Some bar, he meant. He'd come home drunk . . . he'd want to make love to me . . . he'd demand it, as if it were a right!

"That's too bad," the girl said. "We'll only have time for a dip before we leave, but we'd have liked to have her with us."

Before we leave! They could leave. I couldn't!

"We're going on through to New York tonight," I heard her explaining. I sat down suddenly on the edge of my bed. Was this my chance? Must I make up my mind to do something definite? New York—I'd hated it—but I knew a few people there. It couldn't be worse than the life I'd been living. Going on through to New York tonight. I uttered a little cry and slipped out the back door. When they finished their dinner and came again to their cabin, I was there—waiting.

"I heard what you said in the lunchroom," I began. The girls brushed past me and went into the cabin, but Elaine, the girl who had spoken to Tom, stopped and looked at me incredulously.

"Great heavens—what do you mean?" she gasped. "You're shaking all over. What's the matter?" She caught my arm and led me into the cabin.

"I'm all right," I told her desperately. "Only—you said you were going to New York! I haven't any money—but I've got friends in New York. Oh, I know I shouldn't ask you—but if you could give me a lift—"

My tears overflowed, and I dabbed wildly at my eyes. "You—you want to leave your husband?" came Elaine's startled question.

"Yes!" I cried. "Let me go with you—you'd do it if you understood—"

Those other girls—they called Elaine away from me before she could answer. I heard what they told her. "You can't do it Elaine! You mustn't. Why that husband of hers might shoot, or something."

I never saw Elaine after that night. But I won't forget her—ever. For when I told her how things were with me, she brushed aside her friends' objections, and we made our plans.

I HAD my things packed ten minutes after Tom left the house. Thunder rumbled far off across the lake, as I snapped my bag shut and carried it to the porch. There'd be a big storm. It came nearer and nearer as I stood there waiting for the car. Wind sprung up from nowhere to cool the sun-baked camp. The first drops of rain beat down on my parched skin. Summer was over.

The girls' cabin went dark. They were getting into the car. It's lights glimmered through the rain as Elaine swung it around the drive toward the lunchroom. I watched her approach. The driving rain beat hard on the porch roof, and I didn't hear the motorcycles until they swerved in at the driveway. Elaine got out at the steps, and almost ran into the two raincoated policemen hurrying toward me from the other side.

"Take it easy, lady!" the cop said. "Tom isn't hurt bad." (*Continued on page* 64)

**He tipped up my face and kissed me, long and thrillingly—and I forgot my unhappiness.**

# DANGEROUS



# INNOCENCE

My throat clogged with fear as he came nearer. No matter how I did it, I had to get away from him!

THE TOWN Mother, Dad, and I lived in was like thousands of others all over the country. Neither very large nor very small. But we prided ourselves on being progressive. The school system was the last word in modernity. We had an impressive number of churches, women's clubs, theatres, and public buildings. In others words, Creyton was just an average American town. And we were average American people.

I had grown up with most of the kids that went to high school with me. If Mother and Dad didn't know their parents personally they knew them by reputation. They tactfully saw that I went with the right crowd. I don't mean that they were snobs. Money and position were less important to them than character and breeding. But I, like a little fool, envied the girls whose parents gave them a free rein.

Marcia Travers, for instance. She was about my age, with dark, shining curls and eyes that fairly snapped. It was whispered among some of the girls that she was a "hot number," but you'd never have guessed it from the demure way she acted around grownups.

Mother never objected when I went to parties at her house. But then she didn't know that Marcia usually threw the parties when her folks were away. Honestly, though, as far as I knew, nothing went on that the whole world mightn't have seen. We were just a bunch of rowdy kids, dancing to the radio, cutting up, and raiding the ice box. That is, until Marcia introduced Ralph Lovatt to us one night.

I wish you could have seen how all the girls fell for Ralph. He was older than the other boys and had the bored, superior air of a college man, though he didn't actually say what college he attended. I could see his heavy-lidded eyes deliberately sizing up each girl. Then he came over to me and asked me to dance. His smooth, sophisticated steps and the close way he held me sent funny little chills racing all over me.

Afterwards, we crowded around Marcia in the kitchen when we were fixing soft drinks and sandwiches. "Who is he? Where did you pick him up? Gosh, is he smooth!"

"They've just moved into the apartment house next door," said Marcia. "You should see his mother. She wears the smartest clothes—and boy what a figure! And she's swell to talk to. She invited me in and served tea and cakes. Just like you read about in English novels."

"But does your mother know her, Marcia?" I asked a little uncertainly.

I was answered by a chorus of jeers: "Lucile, you little drip! What century do you suppose you're living in? Act your age!"

It made me mad to be laughed at, so I danced with Ralph the rest of the evening just to spite them. When the party broke up he offered to drive me home. He glanced at his wrist watch. "So they roll up the sidewalks here at eleven sharp," he observed with amused contempt. "How about you and me driving into the city and doing some of the night spots?"

Why, he must think I was grown up! I thrilled with excitement. It was a terrible blow to my pride to have to tell him that I had to be home by twelve. He looked at me sharply, but without another word drove me home.

He parked outside our house and turned off the car lights. Other boys had done that. Other boys had kissed me goodnight. But not the way Ralph did. It wasn't a shy peck he gave me, but a long kiss that left me breathless. It was sweet, yet somehow it scared me. "You mustn't!" I whispered.

He laughed mockingly. "Now, don't try to kid me, Lucile. You've had boy friends before, haven't you?"

"No steady boy friend. Mother thinks I'm too young," I said.

He tilted my face up and his lips slid from my mouth to the little hollow in my throat. "Just how old are you, darling?" he asked.

"Eighteen," I lied. Perhaps if I had told him the truth, pity for my youth might have stirred in his heart. Even if pity hadn't deterred him, fear of the law might have. But I knew nothing of all that. I was a "nice girl."

I said I had to go, and started to open the door. He jumped out of the car and came around to help me. It had been raining and the street was wet, and as I gingerly stepped to the sidewalk Ralph swung me up in his arms. There, close in his arms, pulses I didn't know I possessed began to beat. He smiled down at me. "We've got to see more of each other, baby," he whispered hoarsely. "You're my type. Sweet—and hot!" The shock of his words left me gasping for a moment. But that's the way men and women of the world talk, I told myself. I mustn't act as though I were a prude. But all the same I crept upstairs guiltily that night—on tiptoe, so that I wouldn't have to face Mother with my telltale flushed cheeks and my too bright eyes.

IT WAS at Marcia's a few days later that I met Mrs. Lovatt. She was just as Marcia had described her. Smooth. She spoke in a deep throaty voice, and her clothes were the last word in smartness. I could see Marcia and the other girls studying her make-up. "Mrs.



**"She's lying," I cried hysterically. "I didn't lead him on! I hated him but I didn't want to kill him!"**

Lovatt," they begged, "tell us the name of your perfume."

"For heaven's sake, stop calling me Mrs. Lovatt," she cried in mock horror. "I'm Crystal to my friends." She rose. "Sorry, Marcia, dear, that I can't stay to meet your mother, but I have a dinner engagement. Why don't you all come over to my apartment tomorrow night? We'll turn on the radio and dance." She turned to me. "You too, Lucile."

My heart skipped a beat. I'd see Ralph there. Somehow, any party now was a flop without Ralph. But when I told Mother about it she raised her eyebrows.



**If only girls were told the facts of life with frankness and reality, then tragedies such as this would never occur**



**There, in his arms, pulses I didn't know I possessed began to beat.**

"Who *is* this Mrs. Lovatt?" she wanted to know. "Does she belong to any local church or club? Do any of our friends know her? No, my dear, you can't accept an invitation from a woman of whom I know nothing."

I stamped my foot and angry tears stung my eyes. "Mother, you're positively stuffy! All the other kids are going. After all, I'm not a baby any more. I'll soon be seventeen."

"In nine and a half months, to be exact," she smiled. Then she patted my hand. "When you're as old as I am, dear, you'll understand why I'm so careful of my little girl."

*Mother, why did you put me off with vague half-hints? Perhaps the sordid, ugly truth would have shocked me, but at least it would have put me on my guard.*

On the night of the party Dad suggested a movie, but I went to bed in a sulk. I felt resentful against the whole world. And I didn't feel any better next morning when Marcia gushed about the perfectly marvellous time they had. "Guess what!" Her voice sank to a whisper. "The punch was spiked. Honest! Some of the kids got tight. You'd have screamed."

That should have warned me. Making a bunch of high school kids tight! But we thought it was being sophisticated and daring.

I met Ralph several times at Marcia's after that. He always took me home. And he always kissed me good-night. His kisses set my blood on fire. I little guessed that he was deliberately awakening me. I didn't know what was happening to me. I only knew that it was wonderful to be in his arms.

One night, as he held me to him, he said hoarsely, "I can't bear to think of any other guy kissing you like this."

I pulled myself out of his (*Continued on page 38*)

ALL MY life I will remember the bitterness and jealousy I felt that night I saw Kathie in Ronnie's arms.

I was sitting in the yard when Ronnie brought her home. Just sitting there in the dark, hating myself and all the world, especially Ronnie. I kept very still as they came into the yard and seated themselves in the lawn swing. Without a word Ronnie took Kathie in his arms and kissed her, while all my muscles leaped in protest. Still, I didn't move, and it didn't bother me at all that I was eavesdropping.

Then Ronnie said, "I'll get you a ring tomorrow. Oh, Kathie, it's too good to be true! I can hardly wait to tell the folks. But I wish you were older. I wish I could marry you right now instead of waiting till you're through school."

I couldn't hear what she said, but I could see her hand go up to his face, and I yearned to rush over, snatch him away from her and break his neck. I didn't sleep much that night. I lay awake hating Ronnie lying asleep there in the next room. Ronnie got all the breaks. He could get anything he wanted, including the girl I loved. It wasn't fair!

Ronnie was my foster-brother. My parents adopted him before I was born. They had been married several years and had come to believe that they were never to have any children. Ronnie came from a foundling home. Nobody ever knew his last name—perhaps he never had one. Many times I have heard my mother tell people how beautiful Ronnie was as a baby; what thick dark curls he had, what angelic blue eyes.

Ronnie was three when I was born, and my earliest feeling about him was a strange mixture of adoration and hatred. It wasn't long until I was fully conscious that people didn't admire me as they did Ronnie; and that means a lot to a child. I was a tow-headed little boy with delicate features and a rather sullen mouth. I must have been about eight when my mother, in the midst of a eulogy on Ronnie's charms, suddenly paused and caught me to her. "But Arnold is Mother's little man, too!" she cried. That clinched the thing in my mind. I would never be to her what Ronnie was, even though I was her own flesh and blood and he wasn't.

By the time I was seventeen, my feeling for Ronnie was pretty complex. I worshiped him, and yet I hated him. Ronnie could do anything. He could go with any girl in town, he could get anything he wanted just by turning on that charm which made you his slave. He was as handsome as a god at nineteen. Tall and slim with curly dark hair and a smile that could charm the heart out of the devil himself. Everybody in Centerville adored him, and he was asked to all the parties which took place in our town.

I was asked, too, of course, but I was perfectly aware that I was invited only because I was Ronnie's brother. Ronnie would coax, "Come on, Arnold. Why don't you want to go with me any more? What's the matter?" I don't think he ever knew that my heart was full of a bitter jealousy that was to bring tragedy to both of us.

Then the Fenwicks moved into the house next door, and Kathie came into our lives. She was about a year younger than I, and she was very lovely. Both Ronnie and I fell in love with her from the start, and my childhood hatred of him sprang to life again when I saw Kathie's brown eyes turn warm and soft whenever she looked at Ron. But I had one advantage. Kathie and I were still in high school and Ronnie had already graduated. I could walk back and forth with her, I could carry her books and have a few precious hours with her every day. Also, I discovered bitterly, I could answer all her questions about Ronnie.

Ronnie started taking her to parties with him. He had a car and a good job at the paper mill in Centerville. His clothes were always perfect, and people referred to him as "every inch a gentleman." And when he started taking Kathie around, everyone remarked about what a handsome pair they made. I stayed at home, and that dark hatred ate deeper into my heart.

RONNIE told Mother and Dad about his engagement to Kathie at breakfast the morning after that night I had jealousy watched him take her in his arms. I could see that my parents were pleased. "Why Ronnie, that's just lovely!" said Mother. "I was hoping this would happen! I only hope Arnold can find a girl as sweet as Kathie."

Ronnie smiled at me. "I do, too," he said. "But I can tell him right now there isn't another like Kathie."

I made a wry face. "Oh, she's okay," I said airily. "But there's plenty of others." Not for the world would I let them know that my heart was breaking; that I was hoping something would happen to Ronnie before he could marry Kathie. My imagination went to desperate lengths. I pictured Ronnie dying, the victim of an accident perhaps, and Kathie turning to me for comfort.

Things went on much the same for a time. I graduated from high school and went to work in the office of my father's hardware business. Ronnie and Kathie were like two people who had been removed from the world into a paradise of their own where nothing existed but bliss.

# I TRIED TO

Her arms went around me and she pulled me close. After that time held no meaning for me.

I tried to wrest the gun from Ron's hand, but he struggled like a tiger.



# CONCEAL MY GUILT

Then came the night when their paradise was destroyed. I remember it as plainly as if it were yesterday. We were all at the dinner table, and Mother was making plans for Ronnie's wedding which was to take place soon. The doorbell rang and Father went to answer it. The next we knew there was a commotion in the hall, a man's loud voice, then a woman's. I saw Ronnie's face go white as he rose from his chair. He looked around wildly as if he were trying to find a place to hide.

Mother and I rose as Father brought the strangers into the room. But they weren't strangers to me, not the girl at least. I recognized her as Fritzie Dolan, a girl who worked at the paper mill, and whose name was familiar to most of the Centerville boys. She was a plump little thing and her face was like a wax doll's. She always wore too much makeup, and her hair was bleached a bright yellow. Evidently the man was her father.

He spoke up in a loud voice, "This young whelp needn't think he can ruin Mike Dolan's daughter and get away with it! I know what's been goin' on. Him and his fine manners and his pretty face. If she's good enough for him to take, she's good enough for him to marry!"

We all stood there in horrified silence watching Mike Dolan's tobacco-stained mouth spit out those fateful words. Fritzie kept chewing her gum and smiling at Ronnie. Father's face was very stern as he said quietly, "Do you know anything about this, Ronald?"

Ronnie's eyes looked as if he were dying. His tongue flicked over his lips and he whispered, "No, Father, I don't."



**At night I'd awaken, cold with fear, and I could almost see Ron sitting there, numbly watching them carry Fritzie away.**



**"I'll spend my life making you glad you married me, Kathie," I said.**

"Ronald, don't lie to me!" Father's voice cracked like a whip. "If you've had anything to do with this girl, say so. The truth, now!"

"Look at him!" jeered Mike Dolan. "It's written all over him. He thought he could play around with my girl like any cheap—" He glanced at Mother and tried to lower his voice. "Fritzie tells me she needs a wedding ring to make this thing right."

Mother flung herself on Ronnie, crying, "Oh, no, no! It isn't so, is it, Ronnie? You couldn't have done a thing like this! Tell me it isn't so! What about Kathie? You love Kathie. You couldn't have—"

Ronnie's face looked old. All the boyishness faded out of it, all the charm was gone. It was the face of a man, hard and flat as if cut from stone. "It's true," he said in a voice we could



**Can a man ever find peace if he lets another pay for his iniquities?**

scarcely hear. "Yes, it's true. I'm—I'm sorry, Dad."

Father gave him one terrible look as he ushered Mike Dolan and Fritzie out of the house. And when he came back, he spoke a few short words to Ronnie. "I expect you to marry that girl. If not for her sake, then for your mother's and mine."

I had been standing there silent with mixed emotions blazing inside me. Pity for Ronnie, and blended with that pity a feeling of high exultation. He wasn't going to get Kathie after all!

I don't know how Ronnie became entangled with Fritzie Dolan, but I could understand. Ron was in love with Kathie, but they couldn't marry for a year. Kathie wasn't the kind of girl who would do anything wrong. Fritzie probably threw herself at Ronnie, boldly went after him and eventually drove him beyond his endurance. Quite a triumph for shanty-born Fritzie Dolan if she could wangle a marriage with Centerville's idol! I knew it was a lot of nonsense for Father to insist on Ron's marrying her. Any boy in town could have told you something about Fritzie Dolan.

If I had been in Ron's boots, I would have skipped before I'd have married that cheap little thing. But not Ron. Maybe he really felt a sense of responsibility toward her. Anyway, he married her the next day and rented a house about two blocks away from us.

I saw Kathie that evening, and I knew by the look on her face that she had been told. Maybe Ron had told her himself, or perhaps Mother. She was sitting on the porch all by herself, and I went over and took her hand. "I'm sorry, Kathie."

She didn't seem to hear me. Just sat there staring down at her hands. After a long time she looked up at me and her eyes were full of tears. "How could he, Arnold? How could a man do such a thing to the girl he loves?" She rushed into (*Continued on page 49*)

# "FORGIVE ME, *Greg*!"

## CRIES THIS HEARTBROKEN GIRL WHO GAVE HER KISSES TOO FREELY

A STORM has lashed the mountains all day and my tears have kept pace with the never-ceasing rain. I've been reading a book, a first novel, of which the critics said: *"This young writer shows flashes of genius in his story of an idealistic boy's first love and its bitter disillusion."*

You were that idealistic boy, Greg. I was that first love—and that bitter disillusion.

Maybe if I hadn't met Stu Hawkis first . . . but I did. And I was headed for it, anyway.

After my parents' divorce, when Mother remarried and moved East, my world seemed to fall apart. Father was absorbed in his mining interests; the housekeeper was under my imperious thumb. So I did just about as I pleased. Running wild to assuage the loneliness in me. To still the aching longing for I knew not what.

At college, I fell in with Stu and his crowd of super-sophisticates. He and I, Lorraine Prescott, led the most exclusive and the fastest crowd on the campus. We broke the rules and got away with it. Setting our own standards and ridiculing the rest of the world.

Then I met Greg.

That October afternoon my English teacher had urged me, for the umpteenth time, to submit some of my work to the college magazine and, on an impulse, I sailed into the cluttered basement offices of *"Script."*

"Having dashed off some gems of literature—" I began in my usual flippant manner. But then the boy behind the desk rose and I was looking into a pair of eyes as blue as the sky, as deep as eternity.

Furiously, I realized that I was blushing. Kid stuff. Why, I hadn't blushed in years.

"I am the editor, Gregory Vladmir." The courteous inclination of his head, the half-bow, should have been funny. But with Greg it was—just natural.

"I have some poetry here." I took the manuscripts out of my purse and his face lighted with interest.

I sank into the chair which he held for me, feeling a little dazed. Here was a man who fell on poetry as if it were food and drink. He frowned in concentration as he read it.

"It's rough. The feeling is confused. But you have talent—and you have gray eyes!" He said it all in the same breath and I could hardly keep from gasping.

He stared at me with the absorbed, unabashed interest of a child. Noting my gleaming black braids caught round my head coronet-fashion, the chic black suit outlining my tall slimness.

"Well," I drawled, "are you going to put my picture in the magazine?"

"No, but I'd like to." His smile was warm as sunlight. "You're very beautiful."

Poor Greg—with his brilliant mind—and his sensitive soul—and his incredible naivete!

He intrigued me and stirred me. But it was absurd to think that I might be really interested in him. Why, we moved in such different worlds that we'd gone to the same college for three years without ever hearing of each other.

It was just something new, I kept telling myself when I got in the habit of dropping into the *"Script"* office. Greg criticized my work and we read poetry together and, after a few weeks, he asked me for a date.

By Saturday night, when I was on a party at Stu's shack in Indian Canyon, I began to think I'd been crazy to say I'd go out with Greg. None of us ever dated out of our own snobbish crowd. And what would the gang think of Greg! A professor's son, a poet, the editor of *"Script."* They might even find out that I was trying to write and I knew what that would bring on!

Sunday morning I phoned to make some excuse for putting off our date. But Greg wasn't there. "Out for one of his ten-mile strolls," Dr. Vladmir chuckled. And then, "You are the girl, eh? Greg has told us about you and my wife invites you to call."

Weakly I let the phone fall into the cradle. Greg was out hiking. He told his parents about *the* girl. I felt as if I'd gotten involved with a family from Mars.

"Well, I've been around," I told myself, as I showered and brushed my hair, "but this is something new."

AFTER dinner, we all went out on the porch and the boys gradually drifted over. Stu was about half-drunk. "I've got another date today," I told him. "There are times when you bore me."

"So?" His dark brows quirked as he looked at me. "Well, the feeling's mutual, Lorry. Look's like we're going to have a hell of a time if we ever get married."

He lounged on the steps, impeccably-groomed and so very, very sure of himself. He *was* attractive—and he was my kind. We understood each other.

"Look!" He sat up suddenly. "What—what is that?"

I turned and went hot with humiliation.



"Lorraine is engaged to me," Greg said, his voice grim, tense, "but I've never held her in my arms like that!"

Slowly, tenderly, his lips lowered to mine.



**Frantically, I fought him, tried to tear myself away from his powerful arms.**

There was a car just pulling up in the driveway—a years-old, painfully-polished sedan. Among the other long, sleek cars, it showed up like a gadget from the dime-store. My years of snobbishness rose up in me and choked me.

Then Greg got out . . . and I couldn't believe it.

He wore a blue sweater and khaki breeches and boots!

"Ah—a boy scout!" somebody laughed. And I cracked back, automatically, "No. One of the Rover Boys."

So they were all laughing as Greg swung toward us and, sharper than my own humiliation, I suddenly felt sorry for him. I'd seen this crowd work on people before—upstarts who tried to crash our royal exclusiveness.

But I didn't know Greg!

He came up on the porch and spoke to me and then he stood smiling while I introduced him. Perfectly courteous, perfectly at ease. He just ignored the sneering glances and the mocking bows. I had to admire him for it.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Lorraine," Greg apologized when he noted my green date-dress. "I thought you understood it was to be a picnic."

"A picnic!" Stu howled. "Well, now, isn't that just precious? Let's all go."

"Stu!" I glared at him and he sank back down, shrugging in pretended disappointment. "But you will bring us back some wildflowers, won't you?"

I took Greg's arm, hurried him down the steps, talking nervously to over-ride the buzz of hilarious comment which followed us. But there wasn't even a hint of embarrassment about Greg. "That's a queer crowd for *you* to be with, he said, as he helped me into that awful car.

The tinge of contempt in his voice made me stare. Made me forget that I'd decided to tell him to just drive around the block and let me out again—to explain that our date had been a mistake.

But the way he scorned my crowd was too much for me. Didn't he realize that we formed the most exclusive group on the campus? That we all had money? Stu's father, for instance, was one of the most influential men in the state and, as Stu put it, filthy rich.

Greg didn't know—and he didn't care! "You're real and they're not." With that he dismissed them.

Nobody could put on an act like that, and it fascinated me. How could anyone be so scornful of the things which meant prestige to us. Money, social standing, a perfected sophistication were our standards. What then were Greg's? (*Continued on page* 51)

# *I married for* MONEY

***A REAL STORY COMPLETE NOVELETTE***




I LEANED all my weight against the bedroom door, feeling the chill of the cold oak panels through the satin of my wedding gown. The sound of footsteps in the hall died away, but their passing brought me no relief from dread, for I knew that the next footsteps I heard might be his.

He would come in silently, without knocking, with that eager glint in his eyes. He would take me in his arms, and I would have to let him kiss me. He was my husband.

I shuddered, sick with revulsion at the thought of it. On legs stiffened by fright I walked to the window and stood looking out on the vast grounds which surrounded the big house.

Behind me the door was swinging open. I felt it before I heard it. My nerves tautened as I felt him coming into the room, moving across the rug toward me. When he reached out hard hands to draw me into his arms a cry of fear and rebellion pushed upward in my throat to be smothered by his mouth crushing down upon mine . . .

I had thought that I loved Simon Leuder. My father had told me that he was a smart man, and kind. Hadn't he come himself to the little mustard colored Company house where we lived to visit Dad after he was hurt in the accident in the Mill?

There were those who said Dad should have sued the Company, but Dad wouldn't listen. Awed and flattered by Simon Leuder's friendship, my father remained loyal to him until the end. And after Dad was gone and the bottom fell out of the world for Mom and my little crippled sister Deedie and myself, I clung to Dad's



**"Forgive me," he rasped. "I must have been mad, crazed by jealousy!"**

**Dan's voice broke as he whispered, "I can't live without you, Marnie."**



belief in Simon Leuder's goodness, and transferred to him all the affection I had lavished upon my father.

I was only sixteen, grief-stricken and bewildered; and when Simon Leuder asked me to marry him it seemed like an answer to prayer.

"You're very beautiful, Marnie," he told me one day, out of a clear sky. "I want you for my wife."

It meant no more struggling to make ends meet for Mom. Deedie could have the treatments that would make her walk again. It meant we could be secure and happy.

I had never had a boy friend in my life, unless you count Elmer Holt, who took me to the Junior prom. I didn't know the first thing about love. I was just little, shy Marnie Raine who never had any fun because she always had to take care of her little sister. And now I was to be the wife of Simon Leuder, who owned the Mill and practically every house in Leuderville. I would be mistress of the big white house on the hill which had always seemed like a castle to Deedie and me.

I kept thinking, kept saying over and over, "I'm the luckiest girl alive!" To have this good fortune fall into my lap! I had to pinch myself to believe it.

Our wedding was the largest the town had ever seen. I had six bridesmaids in bouffant pastel dresses, and white orchids in my bride's bouquet. When we came out of the church that gold and blue June day, the crowd pushed close to stare at me.

Just before Simon put me into the long black car at the curb, I heard a woman's voice say, "But she's so *young!*" Another voice, brittle and sarcastic, answered, "Margaret was young, too, when he married her."

Margaret! That would be Simon's first wife, the one who had died three years before, the thin nervous woman I had seen sometimes coming out of the beauty shop on Fourth Street, the one about whom Mom had said, "That Leuder woman spends more money on her hair every month than I'll ever get my hands on."

I had never thought much about this woman who had been Simon's first wife; but now a tiny spear of jealousy stabbed through me. Jealous of Margaret Leuder! How soon I was to discover that I had nothing of which to envy her—unless it might be the peace of death which freed her from the cruel dominance and brutality of Simon Leuder.

I married in good faith, resolved to be a good wife; but I was completely unprepared for what lay before me. Shrinking in horror that first night from the shock of his brutality, I cried out, "But I thought you'd be kind!"

"I am kind," Simon told me, laughing, pulling me into



his arms again. "Have you forgotten so soon what I've done for your mother, for Deedie?"

My heart lurched in my breast. In my fear of him I had forgotten Deedie and Mom.

Since the day I promised to marry him, Simon had been a magician working miracles. Mom was already living in a cozy apartment uptown, Deedie was in the sanitarium at Green Briar, taking the treatments that would make her walk again . . . little elfin Deedie, who had been so gay and lively before the epidemic of infantile paralysis hit Leuderville.

SOMEHOW I lived through our honeymoon. I even tried to tell myself that marriage was like this, that women had to endure it, that all men were like Simon. But

deep in my heart I knew that it wasn't true. Women I saw on the street, laughing, talking happily, couldn't have risen from such nightmare as this.

I thought that after Simon went back to work, settled into his normal routine, things would be better. But nothing changed. Every night Simon drank alone in his study and came to me with his face flushed. He filled me with revulsion, and when I shrank from him he became furious.

No, nothing changed, except that I stood each morning at the window of the big house on the hill, and watched him drive away and wondered how it was possible for such a thing to happen. How could he walk the streets as he always had, commanding the fawning respect of everyone, when behind the high dark windows of the old Leuder house he kept me a prisoner, subjecting me to brutalities that cannot be told.

One night when I thought I could bear it no longer, I cried out, "You don't love me. You never did. Then why did you marry me?"

For an instant he just looked at me. Then he pushed back the lock of gray hair that covered his bald spot, viciously, as if it offended him.

"I want a son," he said, the words coming slowly and deliberately from between his thin lips, "and you are young and healthy."

So, only a few weeks after I had become Simon Leuder's wife, any illusions that might have made my life with him endurable were shattered. He had chosen me as he would have chosen a healthy animal for his stables. He saw in me only the means of producing the son Margaret Leuder had failed to give him and that he wanted so much that the desire had become an obsession, pushing everything else to the background of his mind.

As the months went by I, too, disappointed him, as Margaret had; and his disappointment manifested itself in periods of dark brooding melancholy which always ended in an outburst of rage. He moved like a living dead man through the house, his eyes downcast, his shoulders drooping. The cook worried because he left his meals untouched; the other servants scurried out of his way. But I was more frightened than any of them. For I knew and dreaded what would follow—his nightly drinking alone in the study, his footsteps on the stairs . . .

Deedie could almost hold her weight on one spindly little leg. There was to be a bone operation that would straighten the other one. As we left the sanitarium one day Mom stopped suddenly on the sidewalk with tears of thanksgiving trembling in her eyes:

"Simon Leuder's an angel, that's what he is," she said shakily, "taking care of all of us like this! Oh, Marnie, show him how grateful we are. Be a good wife to him, dear."

What could I say? What could I do? On numb legs I walked up the path to the big white house. With numb lifeless fingers I turned the key in the door that was always locked and went in and climbed the stairs, passing through the big bedroom into the little gold and blue sitting room that was my only sanctuary in the big house. I dropped to my knees at the open window, burying my face in my folded arms upon the sill, feeling the warm breeze of another Spring lifting the gauze of the curtain and blowing it back and forth across my hair.

"Oh, God, let me have a child," I prayed. "A

**As I heard her sob. "Oh, Rusty darling. are you all right?" a cold hand clutched at my heart. She loved him!**





son for Simon so this horrible nightmare can end."

But the months dragged on and none of my prayers were answered. Twice in those months I ran away, plunging down the garden path, stumbling away from him in the night. One of those times I fainted and rolled over and over down the wide steps into the sunken rose garden, and Simon found me there and brought me back. The other time I drove all the rest of the night in the little roadster Simon had given me for Christmas, taking roads I'd never seen before, winding through hills that stood around me calm and impersonal in the shadows. I left the car and walked blindly through the woods, leaning against an old spruce to weep hysterically where there was no one to hear me. That day I planned divorce, secretly, and hugged the plan to my heart for days, clutching at it as a dying person will hold fast to any hope of salvation.

The next week Mom died, suddenly, of a heart attack. I found her lying on the bed, half dressed, when I went to pick her up for our usual visit to Deedie. I had made up my mind to tell her that Simon was cruel, that I could endure it no longer. But she was dead.

Simon insisted upon a bronze casket, buried her in the Leuder family plot with the (*Continued on page* 43)

I WAS all set for a boring evening, the night Bob Marlowe persuaded me to accompany him to the experimental dance up at Riverdale's Institute for Girls.

"Boy! Will Liz get a kick out of *this* when I write her!" I chuckled, driving through the dusk with Bob toward Riverdale. I smiled to myself as I pictured Liz, after we were married, recounting my adventure over a cocktail.

"Oh, by the way," Bob interrupted my thoughts, "I picked up two orchids before I left. One for my date, and one for yours."

"Orchids!" I snorted, "for dames at a reform school?"

"Off-hand," Bob said quietly, "can you think of anyone more likely to appreciate them?"

That was like Bob. Since our boyhood days, straight through State U, Bob was the best pal I'd ever had. Even when Liz narrowed the field down to me and accepted my engagement ring two months before graduation, Bob didn't let it put a dent in our friendship. Aside from being the most promising young doctor in the city, Bob's always been a crusader at heart. The way he'd slaved to get invitations for us to this reform school hop, you'd have thought it was a diplomatic reception for royalty.

We didn't talk much the rest of the way up. And as usual, I found myself thinking of Liz and missing her. She'd left the week before with old Mrs. Somerset, for whom she worked as companion.

"My job's really a listening marathon," Liz used to say in that flippant way she had. But I couldn't kid about Liz having to work three months longer until I got the raise that Liz felt would make our marriage possible. When I thought of the needless hardships it meant for her, who before her father's death had been practically as wealthy as my folks, I resented Dad's almost fanatical determination to make me start at rock-bottom in the factory. If it hadn't been for the trust fund my grandmother had established for me, I don't know what would have taken care of my dates with Liz.

"Well, here we are." Bob turned into a driveway and parked. Then he said, "Steve, maybe you're wondering why I insisted on your coming with me, tonight. Well, to be perfectly frank, there was a reason. Some of these girls are leaving the institute next week, and with defense booming your Dad's business, I told Mrs. Furness that just possibly you—"

"Oh," I grinned and thumped him on the back. "A job-seeker in sheik's clothing.



**Gently, I put my lips to her cheek.**

I might have known there was a deeper-dyed purpose behind this so-called adventure. Well, Dad might be able to find work for one or two of them at that."

I let him lead the way up the walk toward the open door where Mrs. Furness was painstakingly sorting out the hand-picked guests and introducing them to their dates for the evening. She greeted Bob enthusiastically, and called to a skinny girl, whom she proceeded to introduce to him.

The girl shifted her gum. "Pleasedtameetcha," she mumbled.

I watched the pair move away together with a sinking sensation. My turn next. What might *I* get?

And then I saw her. Dorry, I mean. How can I, even now, describe her as she looked to me when I first saw her in that strange, oddly assorted room?

"Dorry, this is Mr. Stephen Crane," Mrs. Furness was saying. "It's the whistle from his father's factory that wakes us up in the mornings."

All I could do was to stare at her—at the soft, dark eyes, the timid smile, and the way her hair fell like a dark cloud to her slim shoulders. This kid, in a school for wayward girls? Mrs. Furness must have intercepted my thoughts, for she explained quietly, "Dorry has been with us for ten years, Mr. Crane—since she was just a tiny girl. It's going to be like losing my right arm—losing Dorry."

The girl held out her hand, but she didn't say anything as I took it and drifted, with her, into the crowd.

"So your name's Dorry," I said, making conversation. "That's a mighty pretty name. I didn't catch your other name."

"There—isn't any," Dorry said, looking down, lip quivering. "I'm just—Dorry, that's all."

I cursed myself for being a blundering fool. Then I remembered the orchid, and blessed Bill for his thoughtfulness.

She began to tear the tissue paper open with quick, excited fingers. And then, when her eyes fell on the exquisite bloom, she didn't try to hide the tears.

I could have kicked the Steve Crane who said, "Orchids for dames at a reform school?" in that moment.

WHEN I left that night, I'd already made up my mind to see that Dad gave Dorry a job in the factory. When I told her that, she took a long breath, and I saw stars in her eyes.

During the evening, I had a talk with Mrs. Furness. I explained about speaking to my father in Dorry's behalf, and she agreed to give me the case history. Dorry, it seems, was the illegitimate child of a couple unable, through circumstances, to marry. When her father suspected that her mother had been unfaithful to him, he came home drunk and set the house on fire, climaxing a quarrel which Dorry had never forgotten. Both parents died in the fire—the mother trying to save the drunken father.

"Rightfully, she should have been placed in an orphanage," Mrs. Furness told me, "but the county asylum was overcrowded at the time, and since Dorry had seen and heard far too much of sordid things for a child her age, the courts decided to award her to me. She's been like a daughter to me ever since."

So it was that, just three weeks later, Dorry Furness—Mrs. Furness insisted she use her name—came to Crane Industries, Inc., to work as waitress in the employes' restaurant.

"Oh, Mr. Steve, how can I ever thank you?" Dorry rushed up to me the first day I stayed at the factory for

# MINE WAS A COWARD'S LOVE



**"Sorry to interrupt this twosome," Liz drawled, "but I need the evidence."**

lunch. "It—it's like heaven, here!" she said excitedly.

I looked at her, in the pink-checked factory uniform, at her slim loveliness, and I found myself hoping that none of the men tried to date the kid. Why, for all her eighteen years, she was as green as a kindergarten child.

I'd written to Liz about the dance at the Institute. And it was Liz's letter, commenting on my remark that Dad was giving Dorry a try-out in the factory, which first got me worried. *"Next thing you know, your little protegé will be swapping her milk bottles for gin bottles, and your orchids for some of the factory hands' silk do-dabs."*

Just a stray remark between the gay lines of a love letter. Yet it worried me. I'll never be able to explain bow my motivating instinct in being with Dorry those next two months was to protect ber from the other men at the factory—and how, despite it, I was the one to betray her.

I noticed how quickly Dorry picked up the manner of dressing from the other girls at the factory. How she learned to smile across the counter at the commissary, a bright, rouged smile that matched any smile from Hollywood. And I noticed, too, how the men in the factory followed her every movement with their eyes.

"Any of them ever ask you for a date, Dorry?" I asked, one evening, when I was driving her back to her little room.

"You must mean, have any of them not asked me," Dorry parried brightly. "Know what I tell them? I say, thanks, but I'm Mr. Steve's girl."

"But Dorry, I—what I mean is . . ."

"You mean you've got a girl," she said calmly. "Oh, I know that. The foreman of Parts told me you were

(*Continued on page 40*)

# *Be Feminine*

**Career girls, all, are these stars, but they have the art of being truly feminine. Jane Wyatt, newly signed RKO-Radio player, wears an evening dress featuring the "cover up" mode, with its long sleeves and high neck.**





**Wearing costumes only in Paramount's *Great Man's Lady*, Barbara Stanwyck had this softly draped dinner dress designed for her personal wardrobe.**

**Perfect to withstand the blasts of wintry evenings is this smart two-pieced red and black velvet frock selected by Gene Tierney, 20th Century-Fox star.**

**A pleasant peasant style for evening wear is worn by Carol Bruce, new Universal starlet. The pinafore is of black velvet; the blouse is of mousseline.**

# my love problem

**_Read this girl's problem. Help her solve it . . . and win a cash prize!_**

REAL STORY is presenting to you a love problem of a girl who is in desperate need of your advice. What would you do if you were Betty?

Read her problem and write to her in care of REAL STORY, 1476 Broadway, New York, N. Y. For the best letter of advice, REAL STORY will pay $10.00. The winner's name will be announced in the April issue.

I NEED advice. I can't turn to my father for help, because—well, there are certain things a girl can't talk to her father about. Mother isn't alive; she hasn't been alive since I was twelve; I'm twenty now. Now I need her more than I ever have. I know Dad wouldn't understand . . . and it would hurt him so if I told him. So I have written to you for your help.

Sometimes I wonder if mother had lived if I would have had to face this. Oh, I'm not trying to make excuses, I'm not trying to blame Dad. But he had to leave me to myself so much. We had a housekeeper; she was kind, but she didn't take any real personal interest in me. And so I was left pretty much on my own, to run around as I pleased.

When I was seventeen I met Jerry. And fell head over heels in love with him . . . at least I thought I did. We went together for a year, although Dad did mildly protest that I was too young to "go steady," especially with a boy who was away at college most of the time. I honestly thought Jerry and I would be married just as soon as he finished school. I guess that's why, that week-end I went up to the college for the Senior Prom, I let anything happen.

There never was a happier girl . . . not only was I going to a wonderful dance, but soon, oh, so soon, Jerry and I would be married. I got up to the college on Friday night. Everyone went around to the different fraternity houses that evening—the big dance wasn't until the next night. As long as I'd been going to visit Jerry at school, I'd never taken a drink, even though I'd been kidded about it a lot. But that night Jerry kept insisting that we had to celebrate, that I couldn't refuse to have a couple of drinks with him. I compromised on wine. I don't know if it was the excitement, but the few glasses I had made my head spin.

Jerry laughed when I told him and bundled me out to the car. "A drive will fix you up," he told me.

We drove out along the highway and finally Jerry parked near a little wooded glen. It was wonderful there in the moonlight, with his arms around me, his lips on mine. How many times I have wished, so fiercely, that it had stopped there . . . but it didn't. Oh, I was so ashamed, so miserable, especially when Jerry told me I was being silly, old-fashioned. And when I said we'd have to be married right away, he got angry. "Look here, Betty," he said, "stop acting so silly! You know I haven't a job—or even a prospect of one. When school is over Chuck Jorson and I sort of planned to go up to the airplane factory and see if we can't do something."

I tried to tell myself that everything would be all right, that just as soon as Jerry got a job we'd be married. But he acted so funny when he came home that I became afraid. I wouldn't admit the fear even to myself, though. After Jerry was home for a few weeks, he and Chuck went up to the factory and both got jobs. We wrote each other almost every day; but Jerry never

*(Cont'd on page 63)*

# Eye Do's . . .

**1** Your make-up isn't complete unless you include eye cosmetics. Blondes with blue eyes who are the same type as Betty Grable, 20th Century-Fox film star in *Hot Spot*, should use blue, violet or blue-gray shadow with brown mascara and brow pencil.

**2** Even the darkest lashes have a tendency to lighten up near the tips. Brunettes who have the same dark beauty as Margaret Lindsay, who is Nikki in the Columbia Picture, *Ellery Queen and the Murder Ring*, should use mascara to make their lashes longer.

**3** Brunettes with blue eyes, as has Lynn Bari, 20th Century-Fox star in *The Perfect Snob*, should emphasize their eyelids with a faint toned shadow. Be sure you blend the eye shadow from the center of lid with an upward sweep. Use brown or black mascara.

**4** Blondes with brown eyes should use a brown mascara and brown pencil. Penny Singleton, Columbia star in *Go West, Young Lady*, believes that brows should follow a natural curve. Taper your brows gracefully, filling out the end of the curve with pencil.



THE first sign of age in a woman is not wrinkles or gray hairs. It's a state of mind that is usually called "getting set in her ways." It's the stubborn unwillingness to experiment—to try out new ideas in beauty and fashion—and it has nothing to do with birthdays. Some women start getting set when they're twenty-one!

If you've felt this fatal attitude creeping up on you, causing you to go right on doing the same old thing in the same old way, you'd better reform immediately. Why not start with eye make-up? If you've never used it, jog yourself out of that rut and *try* it. Or if you have used it, but with the same old technique for years, change your method . . . and stop being the sort who believes, "What was good enough for grandma is good enough for me."

Here are some tricks you can use when applying your eye make-up, that work wonders! If your brows are skimpy and pale, darken them by blending both brown and black eyebrow pencil, in short, light strokes. It produces a soft, natural effect, completely unlike that old-fashioned sharp pencil line. Another good wile for darkening thin, light brows is to touch them lightly with mascara.

To make coarse, unruly eyebrows behave, try smoothing on a drop or two of wave-setting lotion, and then brush them into place with an eyebrow brush. They'll stay neat and symmetrical all day. And to condition dull, scant brows and lashes, brush eyelash and eyebrow cream into them for at least five minutes every night. The cream gives a lovely sheen, helps keep them from becoming dried out and dull looking.

When applying your cascara, instead of using water to mix the cake type into a paste, substitute a few drops of eye lotion. It really makes a grand mixer. Vaseline is a good one, too, if you want to heighten the glossiness of the mascara.

If you're a blonde or a red-head, why not combine two shades of mascara—brown along the full length of the upper lashes with a final coat of black mascara on the very ends? It gives the tips of the lashes which are always lighter and finer an extra oomph!

If your lashes are naturally dark and your eyes round, use black mascara only on the outer halves of the upper lashes, which are normally longest. Press the brush upward toward the lids before the mascara dries, so that these long outer lashes curl noticeably. Makes your eyes look almond-shaped. Try these new eye-do's!



# Dangerous Innocence

*Continued from page 19*

arms and looked at him with wide, astonished eyes. "Why, Ralph, what kind of a girl do you take me for?" I asked indignantly.

His fingers bit into my arms. "Forgive me, darling," he said, "I'm just a jealous fool, I guess."

A few days after this Marcia drew me aside in the girls' gym. Her voice was trembling with excitement. "Listen, kid, how'd you like a chance to meet some real movie folks? Crystal has got us each an invitation to a swell party at Leon Werner's country place next Friday."

Leon Werner, the millionaire! My eyes nearly popped out of my head. Then my heart sank with a dull thud. "Pardon me while I smile," I said. "Where did Crystal get the idea I'd be allowed to go?"

She grabbed my arm. "Look, we've figured it all out. You can spend the night with me. It's Friday, so your mother can't make homework an excuse. Crystal says she has a dress that will fit you if you can't wear one of mine. It's a cinch. Mom and Dad are away and Delia goes to bed about eight o'clock. Ralph will take you and I'll go with Archie. Gee, I can hardly wait!"

Later, people said Marcia was in on the plot. But I don't believe it. Sure, she was flighty and boy-crazy, and out for a good time. But she didn't know what would happen.

Mother said yes to Marcia's plea that I spend the night with her. I couldn't help a guilty flush creeping up into my cheeks, but Marcia was as demure and innocent as a kitten. But no sooner were we alone than she pirouetted around the room wildly. "Gee, it worked, kid!"

"Oh, shut up, Marcia!" I snapped. It was bad enough deceiving Mother without gloating over it.

All my qualms were forgotten, though, when I slipped into the silver and white dress that Crystal insisted on lending me. When I was dressed Crystal made me turn slowly around in front of Ralph. "Will she do?" she asked. "Boy!" was all he said. But his eyes devoured me. I felt a strange little glow of satisfaction. He was pleased with me. That was all that mattered.

IT seemed as if the drive to Leon Werner's big country place on the edge of the lake would never end. My toes fairly tingled to be on the dance floor. I ached to feel Ralph's arms around me, and his cheek against my hair. It was my first grown-up dance and I intended to squeeze every thrill out of it.

But if I expected to cause a sensation I felt horribly squelched when no one even noticed our entrance. For a moment I was bewildered by the bedlam of laughter, the blare of the orchestra, hard-faced men and women milling about. Then Ralph and I were threading our way through the couples on the dance floor.

When we had circled the room two or three times, I looked around to see where Marcia was, but she and Archie had disappeared. Crystal was dancing with an elderly, paunchy man. As soon as she caught sight of us she stopped and came over to us. "Leon, you must meet our little deb, Lucile," she said smoothly. I hope I didn't look as astonished as I felt. So that flabby, old, dissipated looking man was Leon Werner, the millionaire!

He smiled and his eyes raked me. I could hardly hide my disgust when he asked me to dance. Before I could answer, his arms closed around me and he swung me on to the floor. I threw an appealing glance at Ralph, but he was already dancing with a girl in a daring red gown.

I strained away from my partner as far as possible, but his hand on my back kept pressing me closer and closer to him. I thought, even if he *is* a millionaire I don't have to stand for this kind of thing. So I told him I was tired.

"Tired already, baby?" he smirked. "Why, the fun's just starting. What you need's a little pick-me-up. Let's drop in at the bar."

I'd have given my last nickel for an ice cream soda. But I could see nothing resembling ice cream sodas around there. Some party, I thought dismally! Then I noticed the bartender pour some glasses of amber, fizzy liquid. It looked cool and sparkling, and my mouth was parched. Werner laughed when I said, "Some of that ginger ale."

Of course, as soon as I tasted it I knew it wasn't ginger ale. Believe it or not, I thought ginger ale had champagne beaten hollow. I took a few sips of it and pushed my glass away. Later they tried to prove that I plied him with drink until he didn't know what he was doing. But it was a lie. I didn't drink even half a glass full. And as for leading him on, by the time he had tossed off a few more drinks I got up in cold disgust and slipped out of the hot, smoke-hazy atmosphere on to the terrace.

So this was the party that I had dreamed of and lied for! I could have cried with disappointment and mortification. I wandered like a little lost ghost along the terrace, scared to go into the ballroom alone. It was there, much later, that Ralph found me. "What's the big idea, Lucile?" he wanted to know. "Why aren't you dancing?" I could tell that he was worried and a bit irritated.

Suddenly I was mad clear through. "If I can't get any partner but a fat old man I prefer not to dance," I flared.

He laughed then and tipped up my face and kissed me—and I forgot my anger and disgust. "But, darling, you can't snub your host, you know. Come on, take a turn with me."

Werner must have been on the look-out for us, for we had scarcely circled the room before he cut in. "Now, was that a nice trick to play on me, sugar bun?" he asked plaintively. The fumes of liquor on his breath made me feel faint, but I gritted my teeth and made up my mind to endure the dance to the bitter end. I was relieved to see that the crowd was already thinning out. At the first opportunity I'd ask Ralph to take me home.

But now Ralph was dancing with a girl in black—and not much of that. I saw Marcia and Archie at the far end of the room, but by the time we got around there they had disappeared. Crystal was playing cards somewhere.

The place was practically deserted and I could hardly hold my sleepy eyelids open when at last Crystal floated into the room and told me to get on my wraps.

Fifteen minutes later, we had said our farewells and I had climbed into the car beside Ralph with a vast sigh of relief. Crystal was in the back seat, waving a white hand at Leon, who was standing on the broad, shallow steps that swept up to the house. Ralph started the car and put it in gear. There was a harsh, grating sound.

"What the heck!" he muttered. "Hand me the flashlight out of the pocket, Lucile."

He jumped out, lifted the hood, and peered into the insides of the car. The last of the big sleek cars slithered by us and disappeared into the dark. "Step on the starter," Ralph said.

I sat there tense and nervous. Why hadn't I gone with Marcia and Archie? Now it might be hours before we could even get started. Then Ralph emerged wiping his hands on a rag. "Burned-out generator bearing," he muttered. "I'll have to get a new part and there's not a garage open this side of Creyton."

Leon Werner came heavily down the steps. "Lucky it happened here instead of halfway to town. But don't worry—we can put you up for the night.

A sudden feeling of panic gripped me. "Oh, but there must be *some* way of getting back!" I cried. "You see—you see, Marcia will be worrying about me." What really scared me was that she might phone Mother to see if I had gone home.

"I'll ring Marcia up and explain," said Crystal, getting out of the car. "I'm too sleepy to turn down your offer, Leon."

I FOLLOWED Crystal and Leon upstairs, furious with myself for getting into such a situation. But there was nothing I could do about it.

Leon flung open two adjoining doors. "I think you gals will find everything you need," he said. He was right. Everything from a negligee to a toothbrush was provided for the chance guest. After I had carefully locked my door, I couldn't resist posing in front of the full length mirror in the filmy negligee. I had never expected to wear anything so glamorous and—yes, downright seductive.

I could hear Crystal in the connecting bathroom between our two rooms as I climbed into bed. I must have fallen asleep when I hit the pillow.

I don't know how much later it was that I awoke with a start. For some unexplained reason my heart was pounding suffocatingly. I lay still—listening. I didn't hear a sound, but that queer sixth sense we have told me that someone was in the room. "Is that you, Crystal?" I asked in a frightened whisper.

I heard it distinctly then—a stealthy movement in the darkness. In a split second I was sitting straight up in bed and had switched on the light. My horrified eyes almost refused to believe what they saw. Leon Werner, in a silk bathrobe, coming silently across the room from the direction of the bathroom!

"What—what do you want?" I could hardly get the words out, my voice felt so funny and woolly in my throat.

"I just came to see if you were comfortable, beautiful," he almost purred.

I shrank back as far as I could from him. There was something about his breathing that made my flesh creep. "You've got no business coming into my room!" I panted. "Go—at once—or I'll call Crystal!"

But he kept on coming, his lips twitching horribly. Then, paralyzed with horror, I felt his hands on me, and his lips press mine. A hoarse, frantic cry tore at my throat.

He pressed my face against his shoulder until I could hardly breathe. "Don't be scared, sugar," he rasped.

My terrified scream was smothered in the folds of his bathrobe. He was whispering hoarsely, "You're so young, so lovely. Come now, be sensible. There's no use fighting."

With a desperate effort I managed to twist my head around. Quick as thought, I sank my teeth into his palm. With a yelp of pain he withdrew his hand. That was my chance. I ran across the room and pounded madly at the bathroom door. "Let me in!" I screamed. "Crystal, let me in!"

The door opened so suddenly that I almost fell into Crystal's arms. I clung to her, crying hysterically, "Save me—oh, save me!"

For answer—and I'll never forget the blank horror of that moment to my dying day—she struck me sharply across the mouth. "Shut up, you little fool!" she whispered viciously.

She pushed me back into the room where Werner was dabbing at his hand with a handkerchief. "Why didn't you tame the little hellcat before you brought her here?" he muttered savagely.

God forbid that any other young girl should ever feel such dreadful helplessness, such frantic fear, such shame as I experienced then! Clutching my gown around me, I tried to fight my way to the door. "Ralph, Ralph! *Ralph!*" To this day I can't understand why those desperate screams didn't bring me help. But perhaps the servants had their orders.

Crystal jerked me around, and her eyes were two slits of rage. "We've had just about enough nonsense from you," she spat out. "If you know what's good for you you'll cut out the hysterics." She went into the bathroom and closed the door behind her. I leaned helpless and panting against the wall—at the mercy of a brute who came toward me with a gloating, leering look in his eyes.

Oh, I can't speak of what followed—I can't write it—but I'll never be able to wipe my mind clean from the memory of it. I still dread to sleep for fear I'll wake up, bathed in a cold sweat and shaking with terror, living the whole dreadful scene over again in my dreams.

It's queer, though, how you keep on fighting even while you're praying for death. Somehow I managed to free myself from Werner, and somehow I was on my feet, staggering weakly toward the door. He backed me into a corner. He kept coming towards me again, so bestial and repulsive that my reason snapped, and I reached blindly out and grabbed the first thing near my hand. Later they told me it was a heavy glass book-end. I can vaguely remember raising it high in my hand and bringing it down on my tormentor with the strength of madness. It caught him full on the head with an impact that numbed my arm as far up as the elbow.

# ★ ARE YOU A ROMANCE WRECKER?



Band Leader Sammy Kaye, whose Swing and Sway orchestra is one of America's favorites.

BY Sammy Kaye

YOU SEE, girls, it's this way. He asked you for a date, showed you a gay evening, then bade you a pleasant goodnight. Wonderful! But, you never saw him again. Why?

I never gave it much thought until your editor suggested that, from my vantage point on the orchestra platform directing the boys in the band while hundreds of couples dance past, I'd be in a good position to pick up some pointers on why some girls are popular and others are their own romance-wreckers. I watched and sure enough, I saw how, after boy meets girl, *girl loses boy.*

There's a type of girl that a fellow takes out once, but never again. She may be lovely to look at and wear clothes like a model, but let her give him a line of baby-talk in public, and he wants to run to the nearest exit. I'm not saying that baby-talk isn't all right in the proper private place, but that place certainly isn't the dance floor where other couples can listen in and laugh at him.

As a matter of fact, you'll do much better if you don't talk at all but simply give yourself up to the pleasure of the music and dancing. You've no idea how much that silent technique at this particular point can add to your glamour.

More than once I've seen a certain wistful, unspoiled type of girl, the kind almost every chap likes, come into a night club. A little later when I looked at her, I noticed she was present in body but entirely absent in her former companionable spirit. You see, she'd seen so much night club life in the movies that she thought if she didn't act snooty in that sophisticated atmosphere, her escort would believe she didn't know her way around. Actually, the change in her probably puzzled him so much, he simply concluded he was wrong in thinking she was the fine, sweet girl he wanted to have around for the rest of his life. Result? He never calls again.

Flirting with other men in the room is a fault hard to overlook by a man who is romance-minded. When a girl's attention wanders off to others you can't blame him for feeling he's just being *used*—and resenting it. And the girl who flirts with the musicians to make her boy friend jealous, may succeed in doing that. But she runs the risk of putting the skids on his interest in her, for he'll feel she isn't to be trusted.

On the other hand, one of the best ways to intrigue a man is to be considerate of his feelings. That means you don't stifle him with heady perfume or make a porter of him by loading him down with your gloves, compact or handbag. It's so easy to check these things.

If he isn't the best dancer in the world or doesn't know the latest steps, you don't try to show him up by doing exhibition stuff. Instead, you dance gracefully and tastefully, tactfully following his lead. And you let these same traits run over into every phase of your daily life. For here's a secret: He must have liked you a lot to have asked you out in the first place. Then the smart thing to do is to stick to your original pattern.

He dropped like a bag of sand. For a moment I stood dazed. Then scream after scream was bubbling up in my throat. The next thing I remember the room was full of people, all talking excitedly. Someone—I don't know who—had wrapped a blanket around me. Two policemen were asking me questions, but I could only shake my head helplessly. Then the floor came up and hit me, and mercifully all was blackness.

I CAME to in a hospital cot. It was like waking up from a nightmare at first. Then I saw Mother's and Dad's tragic, haggard faces and I knew it was no dream. I knew that the reality was worse than any dream could be.

I didn't know at first that I was in the hospital ward of the county jail. I didn't even know that I was in custody, for the doctor had forbidden them to tell me that Werner was dead. You see, they feared for my reason for a while. It wasn't until I was stronger that Dad, little by little, and very gently, drew my story from me. I didn't realize that behind a screen a court stenographer was taking down every word.

As soon as the authorities discovered that Crystal was involved, they went to her apartment to arrest her. But they were too late. Both she and Ralph had disappeared. You may remember the nation-wide hunt for the pair. After weeks they were traced to widely separated states and brought back as witnesses.

To save me from all the hideous publicity Dad moved heaven and earth to have the case dismissed. His arguments were my extreme youth and the fact that medical testimony differed as to the cause of death. Some of the doctors attributed it to a heart attack since Werner had been taking treatment for a heart condition. Others were of the opinion that the blow in a vital spot was the contributory cause. But the law had to take its course. A man had met with a violent death. Justice must be done.

I sat, a little shrinking figure, at the counsel table between Dad and my lawyer. We had begged Mother not to face what would have been a frightful ordeal for her. "If I need you I'll send for you," I told her. Poor Mother, she looked so broken, so pitiful, somehow.

So I sat, holding Dad's hand tight, while the prosecution tried to prove that my reputation was not good. They called witnesses to testify that I had plied Werner with drink that night until he wasn't responsible for what he did. Crystal was put on the stand and she flatly denied any knowledge of the whole business. She swore that she was awakened from a sound sleep by my screams, and she stated that the only way Werner could have entered my room was by my bedroom door which I must have purposely left unlocked.

I think I went a little crazy then, for I jumped to my feet and ran to the witness stand. Frantically, I clutched the lawyer's sleeve, tried to force him to listen to me. "She's lying!" I cried hysterically. "I didn't lead him on—I hated him. I tried to get away from him, but I couldn't . . . I had to kill him!"

The court buzzed excitedly, and then Dad was at my side, his arm around me, leading me back to my seat.

A great deal of the trial was taken up with medical testimony. I cringed with shame while the defense doctors impersonally described the condition of my body after the attack. Only the strong clasp of Dad's hand kept me from collapsing.

Then I was put on the stand. My legs were trembling so that my lawyer had to assist me to the witness chair. I tried to stammer out my story, then I covered my face with my hands. "I can't! I can't!" I moaned.

My lawyer turned to the judge. "Your honor, I request that the courtroom be cleared of spectators, including the press, as the testimony of this witness is unprintable."

There was a murmur from the crowd. The judge pounded his gavel. "The witness will testify behind closed doors," he said. In a few moments the bailiff had cleared the courtroom, and I was sobbing out the revolting details of that night of horror. I got along better than I expected. The lawyers were as considerate as possible, and the jury didn't try to hide their shocked sympathy. Some of them probably had daughters about my age. I wonder if they told them!

I thought the horror of the trial would never end. But at last it was over and the jury brought in a verdict of not guilty. I was too apathetic and numbed to feel either relief or joy. All I wanted was to get away where people wouldn't stare at me any more.

But even that consolation was denied me. Crystal and Ralph were immediately arrested on charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. I had to go on the stand again and once more lay bare my shame—this time as a prosecution witness.

A small blue book was found among Crystal's effects containing the names and addresses of a number of young girls. As many of these as could be located were subpoenaed and questioned, but they all denied having any acquaintance with either Crystal or Ralph. In a way, I don't blame the poor frightened kids. I know what a hell such publicity can make of your life.

In the end Ralph won probation by turning State's evidence and telling the whole incredibly sordid story. Crystal ran a number of houses of ill fame where girls worked for her on commission. But that wasn't the worst. She needed girls that her houses couldn't supply—innocent, untouched young girls for men like Werner. That was why she gained the confidence of naive girls of good family. She knew that even if the girls told, their families would hush it up rather than face a scandal.

She used Ralph as a decoy. He posed as her son, and he had ways of finding out which girls would fill the bill. The younger and more innocent the girls the easier it was. It's a racket that's being worked all over the country.

Crystal was found guilty and is now serving a five-year term. That will save other girls, but it can't save me. If I ever marry—which is doubtful, for I fear marriage with a panic-stricken dread—my ugly experience will always stand between my husband and me. Oh, yes, I know you'll say that my attitude is all wrong. That I was the victim of a brutal degenerate man. I can agree with you intellectually. But emotionally it has left me shattered.

SOMETIMES I look in the mirror and wonder why the horrible experience I have been through isn't stamped on every feature of my face. But my cheeks are still soft and round, and my lips are full and tremulous like a child's, and my hair falls to my shoulders in a golden cloud. To glance at me you would think that I hardly knew the facts of life. But when you looked deep into my eyes you'd see the terror and shame lurking there. How many other young, innocent girls met with the same fate as I, will never be known. Girls don't tell such things—unless they have to. That's why I stepped into the trap blindly. No one had ever warned me such things could happen. I trusted everyone. I was just a thoughtless, pleasure-loving, impulsive school girl.

Why aren't our parents honest enough to tell us the dangers a girl faces? We are told, nice girls don't do this and nice girls don't do that—but never a reason why! We should be told the truth, in plain, unmistakable terms. Then if we fall into a trap, it won't be through innocence.

It's to save girls from a tragedy like mine that I'm tearing open my wounds again to tell my story.

THE END

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# Mine Was a Coward's Love

*Continued from page 33*

going to marry a girl from the same kind of folks you've got. Say," she smiled with sudden, engaging humor, "can't *you* take a joke either?"

I drew a sigh of relief. If Dorry knew about Liz, and how we stood, and if Liz knew about Dorry and how *we* stood, I couldn't possibly mess things up by taking an interest in the girl's welfare. Bob Marlowe spent half his time getting people straightened out. Surely, I could do it this once.

Only, I soon found out I wasn't Bob. I wasn't armed with psychology and all the other ologies to deal with what might happen—inside of me. I was just an ordinary, healthy, normal guy, twenty-five years old and lonesome as the dickens for the most exciting girl in the world; a girl with whom I knew I could never feel bored.

IT started out just like any other night. I'd written my letter to Liz. I'd had dinner with Mother and Dad—and Mother was getting the wedding list in order for Liz. She and Liz had been corresponding all summer over arrangements, for the wedding was to take place when Liz returned in September. Though I told myself I was perfectly honest with Dorry, I wasn't, actually. I'd never told her about the approaching wedding.

After dinner, Mother and Dad left for the evening, and I was at loose ends. I'd never taken Dorry out. I'd driven her home plenty of times. Sometimes, on the way home, we'd

stop at a roadside stand for a coke, and that was all there'd ever been to it.

But suddenly, that night, lonesome for Liz, and with nothing but time on my hands, I found myself thinking of Dorry alone in her stuffy little room. What harm could there be in taking the kid for a swim and a bite to eat afterwards? I didn't have any illusions about Liz moping in Maine for me.

Dorry and I drove out along a moon-spattered road to the River Club, a little cluster of commercial buildings catering to fishing, swimming parties, and summer visitors. I parked the car in the driveway, and Dorry and I made straight for the bath-house. Later, in rented suits, we waded, hand in hand, out into the river together.

"Race you to the raft," I called. I was only halfway there, when I noticed that Dorry was in trouble. Fool that I was, I'd swam well ahead of her, and now it dawned on me that she wasn't a good enough swimmer to make it out to the raft against the swift current of the river.

"Steve! Help!" she called out, and the dark head bobbed under the water. Frantically, I swam toward the spot where I'd last seen her. Luckily, she came to the top in a desperate, flaying struggle, and I was able to propel her without too much difficulty to shore.

"Thanks, Steve," she whispered.

I think I prayed in that moment. I know my eyes were stinging with relief when I lifted the small form and began to walk up through the woods to the bath-house.

"I'm all right now, Steve," she said. "Really, I am. That's what I get for being a smarty," she apologized, clinging to my neck.

"I'm going to rent a cabin for you, and come back for you in the morning," I told her. "What you need is a good rest, young lady."

Well, I rented the cabin all right. But by then, Dorry was quite herself again. And so I ordered some hamburgers and cold drinks, and decided, at her insistence, to eat with her before leaving.

"I wish I'd told you I was a rotten swimmer," she confessed, when we were inside the cabin, eating. "When I think that *you* might have lost your life trying to save mine, it makes me terribly ashamed."

I couldn't meet her eyes. We talked some, after that.

Finally, I moved toward the door, and then, when I meant to be saying goodnight, I was kissing her instead. Gently I pressed my lips to her soft cheek, and she came into my arms without a question. Wordlessly, she gave me her lips—and I was only human. It wasn't until later, in the stillness and the darkness, that the enormity of what I'd done came to me.

"Dorry, I—what can I say?"

But her finger against my lips silenced me.

"Please, Steve—I'm not worrying about tomorrow. Just don't say anything to spoil tonight."

That night, at home, I paced the floor. I was sick with the shame of what I had done. And all mixed up, inside. I hadn't stopped loving Liz. I didn't even know if I'd started loving Dorry.

I groped toward a decent solution. And if a man ever felt low and sick at heart, I felt it during that night. In the light of day, when I saw Dorry at the employes' entrance at the factory, things seemed even worse. Worse, until—with that bright and particular smile of hers, Dorry said, calmly:

"Steve, nothing's changed because of last night. You're still your father's son—and I'm still—just Dorry. What's happened was as much my fault as yours. Let's not talk about it—ever."

"But Dorry, we must, I—a fellow can't just take a girl like you and—"

"Simply because he did, ditch a girl like your Liz Amberson? No, Steve. The way I look at it—she's not the one to take the consequences. I have to go in to work now."

Dorry left me with a reassuring smile, and at ten o'clock that morning, Liz, looking like something straight from a fashion book, breezed into my office.

I took her in my arms. Fragrant and lovely, tanned to a turn, hair and skin and eyes all different shades of gold.

I must have said something. My kiss must have passed for something approaching the real article, because the next moment Liz was peeling off her gloves, and draping herself across my desk. "Mrs. Somerset and a Maine watermelon took an instant dislike to each other, and we came home early. I've just come from a huddle with your mother. We're going apartment-hunting this afternoon. Think you could escape your doting father long enough to tag along?"

Liz. Lovelier than ever. Crisp and desirable and so dazzling that I felt like a murderer, standing there before her with my memories of the night just past.

Dad met us in the hall, and he swept Liz and me ahead of him straight toward the commissary. "I can't miss my lunch," he said, "even to hear wedding plans."

So we did. The moment we entered the commissary, I saw Dorry's face light up—then, her gaze falling on Liz, go suddenly white. Presently, we were all at a table, and Dorry was flicking out a cloth, as if nothing had happened, and laying the silver before us.



**I kept remembering Dorry, alone, without family or money, to face travail.**

"We've a special plate lunch today, Mr. Crane," she was saying evenly. "I think you'd like the—"

"You're Dorry, aren't you?" Liz broke in, and smiled up at her. "I think I'd have known you anywhere just from Steve's description. But Steve," she said turning to me, "she's lovely!"

I mumbled something, and Dorry stood there, managing a smile. Then Dad was ordering for us, and the moment passed. The next, Liz had Dad in a huddle over wedding plans. And Dorry served us to the tune of how many bridesmaids and which church and where we'd live.

And all the while I was sitting there, pushing food around, achingly conscious of a little form in a starched checked apron moving back and forth from the kitchen, chin high, slim shoulders squared.

I SAW Dorry alone only one more time before the wedding. There was such a rush of parties. The wedding was on us before we quite knew what was happening. And all the while, one corner of my mind was remembering a small voice whispering in the darkness, "Please, Steve, I'm not worrying about tomorrow. Just don't say anything to spoil tonight."

What sort of girl was she? I pushed aside the thought that this was the beginning of promiscuity for her. You just knew, instinctively, that Dorry was on the level. Then why her attitude? It had me puzzled, and, in the view of my wedding, doubly upset.

Oh, she avoided me, purposely. Every time I went to the commissary, she fixed it so that some other girl served me. So I had to wait outside the factory, begging off from a date with Liz, to see her at all.

When she caught sight of me, she quickened her steps, but I got out of the car and overtook her, offering to drive her home.

"Thanks, Steve," she said, "but I've moved closer to work. It's no distance at all from here."

"Dorry, I—I've been wanting to see you. I—"

"Steve—" She lifted her eyes and fixed them squarely on my face—"there's nothing for us to talk about. You love Liz Amberson, don't you?"

You couldn't lie to Dorry. Not with those eyes on your face. "Sure, I do," I admitted, "but—"

Her eyes fell away. I thought I saw the small chin quiver. But I wasn't sure. "Then what's there to say?" she asked. "*I* wouldn't want a husband *that* way, Steve—any more than your Liz would."

I didn't do anything much but work in the next few months. Dad gave me a substantial raise, but don't think I didn't have to sweat to earn it. Liz kept in touch with our friends for us, and nights, at home, entertained me with their doings.

"Saw Bob today," she announced, one evening in November. "He's been studying aviation, plans to join the R.A.F. soon as they'll accept him. Can you imagine it, darling? Bob throwing a perfectly swell practice right out of the window just for a silly ideal?"

Knowing Bob, I could. But knowing Liz, I didn't argue. Though she'd seemed clever by her ambition before marriage, it had come to be a little irritating, even those first months of our life together, to see how Liz rated money above everything. And I spent more than one sleepless night over the

furniture and the entertaining bills, which were rapidly getting out of control.

Maybe if I hadn't been in a tight spot already, the thing that happened wouldn't have got me down the way it did. I'd gone to Dad's office expressly to ask him if he couldn't let me work overtime some evenings at pay-and-a-half, like some of the men did, so that I could meet my bills. But before I had a chance to open my mouth, Dad took my breath away by saying:

"Son, I had to fire that little girl you persuaded me to hire in the commissary. I never was satisfied with the thought of taking a girl from an institution of that sort. It seems she's going to have a baby. I tried to make her admit who the man was, thought it might have been one of the employees, and I could engineer a wedding, somehow. But she wouldn't say a word—so there was nothing to do but let her go."

It's a wonder Dad didn't suspect something from the way his words knocked the props from under me. Dorry in trouble. Jobless, expecting a baby.

Somehow, I got back to my work. I knew I had to do something. But what? Married to Liz, I couldn't go blundering after the girl. Besides, Dorry had made it clear she didn't want to have anything to do with me. Still, I couldn't let her suffer alone.

In desperation, and because he was the wisest person I knew, I went to Bob Marlowe with my problem. The hardest thing I ever did in my life was to confess my guilt to him. But Bob came through as I'd known he would. He offered to take a letter to Dorry for me, a letter in which I would tell her that I wanted her to have the money from my grandmother's trust fund to see her through the months ahead.

After that, I felt better. Bob phoned me one day not long after, and asked me to meet him downtown for lunch. It was over lunch that he told me about seeing Dorry.

"She wouldn't accept your offer," he explained. "She's already found work with a farm couple, and she's staying with them until the baby comes."

THINGS at home went on pretty much the same. Except that my debts were increasing. It was in May that Liz told me. Her eyes were glinting with excitement when she confided, "Darling, we're going to have a baby!" In the still of the night, my wife in my arms, those would have been the loveliest words in the world—except that, somewhere, at that very moment a young girl, alone, without home or family or money, was expecting another baby.

You can imagine, then, how I felt the following morning, when I was leaving for work and Liz said, "Aren't I smart, darling?" She winked gaily. "An heir in the family and your Dad's bound to give you an up in the firm!"

Needless to say, I didn't mention the matter to Dad. I wasn't going to use a baby's coming to try to get more pay out of my father.

But that night, Liz met me at the door. "Well," she demanded, eagerly, "did it work?"

I think it was in that moment that I saw Liz, for the first time, as she really was.

I got a phone call from City Hospital the very next morning. Dorry's baby had been born, and she'd told her doctor he could get in touch with me.

"The girl had a close call," the doctor told me, when I arrived at the hospital. "For a while, I didn't think we'd pull her through. She worked at that farm up until the last minute. I'm afraid it will be a long while before she can work again. It took me a week before I could get the name of a friend I could call on for her."

He let me see Dorry, then. My heart turned over at the sight of her. She held out a thin white hand, and I took it. I think I knew, from the way I ached to lean over and take her in my arms and kiss the pale cheek down which a single tear was trailing, that I loved her.

She promised, tearfully, to accept the trust fund check each month until she was strong again. "But it won't be for long, Steve," she assured me when I was leaving. "I'm going to do my best to get well. Oh, and with my baby to work for—" her face lighted up—"it shouldn't be hard."

Those next weeks were a nightmare. When Liz found out that I hadn't used the baby's coming to ask for a raise from Dad, she went to him herself. They must have had it out.

I never knew what really happened, but whatever it was, Liz was in a foul mood when she came home. "Whoever heard of having a baby on your salary?" she stormed.

It was just a few evenings later that I came home to find Liz in bed, and the doctor just leaving the house. "It was an accident," she told me sulkily. "I slipped on the stairs—but I'm glad!" she blazed out.

Maybe it was an accident. I'll never know. I'd rather not judge Liz too harshly. I only know that no sooner than Liz was well, she threw herself deliberately into a mad whirl of pleasure. Pleasure I couldn't afford. I told her so.

"Steve, I loathe sermons," she told me with a little mocking smile that night, dressing for a party she was giving. "It's a pity, isn't it, that you didn't marry your little—er—protege? After all, *I* wasn't brought up on stew and corn-bread. You'd better start dressing, or you'll be late for our party."

Our party. Brawl would be a better word. After it was under way, I left the house and almost before I knew it, my footsteps were headed toward the little two-room walk-up where Dorry had gone to live with—our baby.

"Steve, you shouldn't have come here," Dorry told me. "It's bad enough that I've had to take that money from you, but I don't want you coming here, Steve. By next month, I'm sure I'll be able to work and then I won't need the money. Please go, now, Steve, won't you?"

For a moment I just stood there, lonely and heart-sick. She must have seen the anguish on my face, for quick tears sprang to her eyes and she murmured, "Steve, my dear." I strode over to the chair in which she was sitting, sat down at her feet and buried my head in her lap.

"Dorry, I can't stand living like this. I need you, Dorry." Her fingers were on my hair, and just the touch of them was comforting.

It was then that the knock came and the door was thrust open. Liz stood there, her fur jacket carelessly flung about her slim shoulders, that mocking smile I'd come to hate on her lips. Behind her stood a chap I'd known in college. He was practicing law, now.

"Darling, I'm sorry to interrupt this cozy little two-some," Liz drawled. "But evidence such as this will make my divorce so much easier."

Dorry's face went white as Liz walked over to her.

"In case you don't remember," she said, "I'm Steve's wife. Or should I say Steve's other wife? It's cost me a pretty penny to find out about you and your baby and—my husband. You won't blame me for trying to get it back via alimony."

Dorry recovered from the shock quicker than I did.

"Mrs. Crane," she said, "I'm not going to deny that the baby is Steve's. You've got to understand that whatever happened *before* you were married, your husband and I have never —not even once since then——been together. He loves you, Mrs. Crane—not me. Please don't let me be the cause of coming between you!"

"Turning over his grandmother's trust fund to you just out of sheer goodness of heart, I suppose?" Liz flung at her.

It was then I came to my senses.

"Liz," I said, as quietly as I could, "I'm just as glad as you are to know where we stand, at last. Dorry was right about everything except that she's the one I love. You can sue me all you want. But you'll only be cheating yourself out of alimony—because I'll be out of a job. As for Dorry and me, that won't worry us. Something tells me we can both get by on about a tenth of what it takes to keep you in parties."

THAT was three months ago. Liz got a divorce in Reno, and the last I heard of her, she was rumored engaged to marry an oil man from Texas. "Poor fellow," I said to Dorry, "I only hope his wells keep running."

"Steve," she cried. "Shame on you! Liz is the one to pity. Think what a lot a person is missing out of life when they've never learned how to enjoy the little things."

I drew her close in my arms and kissed her. Our small world was complete, and I think I know what she meant. Happiness is as simple as breathing—with a girl like Dorry for a wife.

THE END

# I Married for Money

*Continued from page 31*

most tender solicitude. Deedie, as soon as she recovered from the shock of Mom's death, was to undergo another operation. The doctors had great hopes for her.

I TURNED my plan of escape over, as if it had been a page in a book. Before me the page was blank and too unhappy to contemplate. And then something happened that changed the color of my whole world.

Dan Richardson came! On the blank page of my life his name was written in letters that left no room for anything else.

He was one of a group of men Simon brought home to dinner one night, men who were visiting the Mill. Simon had phoned me earlier in the afternoon to tell me to wear my black velvet with the diamond clips. It made me look older, more mature. Simon was openly proud of my beauty. He always told me what to wear, showed me off to his friends or to strangers as if I were a prized race horse or a fine piece of jewelry he had bought.

Tonight I waited before the fire in the long Leuder drawing room, hating it as I always did. I heard men's voices in the hall and a moment later Simon, in a jovial mood, ushered them in and presented them to me . . . a Mr. Ulmer from Minnesota, Mr. Frederic of Frederic and Stern, exporters. I extended my hand to each of them and said the usual things without even seeing them. For a tall man with a thick crisp mat of bronze hair was waiting just behind the older men, his eyes upon my face.

"Dan Richardson," Simon was saying.

My hand was buried in a big warm palm, a deep voice was saying, "Hello," as if we were old friends meeting unexpectedly. I said, "Hello," and we stood there on an island in the middle of the drawing room while the others moved away like blurred shadows on a screen.

The instant our hands touched it ran through me, a warm flash of something almost like pain, tingling along my nerves, setting a strange sweet bell ringing in my heart. I stood there looking up into the brownest, kindest eyes I had ever seen. He was lean and swift and *young*!

After dinner when we had taken our guests to see the sunken garden, Dan moved close to me and said, "Funny about us, isn't it?"

"Funny?" My heart was beating so hard I couldn't make my voice sound natural.

"I mean—" he laughed a short apologetic laugh— "well, maybe I'm just imagining that it struck you, too, right between the eyes, the way it did me."

The others had moved on, the older ones, talking about Simon's kennel of dogs at the end of the paddock up the steps at the far end of the garden. We were alone for a moment, until they finished their inspection and returned.

Dan was taking my hand, looking down at me with eyes in which there was a sort of startled incredulity. He was saying, "You've been here all the time, and I've been up there at the U. in Seattle . . . less than two hundred miles between us, and neither of us knew."

Simon was coming back with the other two men. I knew that Dan must not be standing here holding my hand with that look in his eyes when Simon came. Yet I couldn't move or breathe or speak. I was thinking, with a cold core of anguish at the pit of my stomach, "Too late now. Too late!" How had we missed each other? Oh, why could I not have waited until Dan came? Why must we be standing here in the rose garden, our lips almost touching, our love pulsing through us, yet separated by the insurmountable barrier of my marriage? Why hadn't something warned me, why hadn't some instinct told me to wait for love . . . for Dan!

Sick with regret, I turned back toward the house, hearing Simon's voice across the rose hedge, coming closer. But Dan's hand tightened its pressure on mine. He turned me to face him and said, "Look at me, straight."

Compelled by his voice I met his eyes with mine and knew that they were betraying me. Dan's tension relaxed and he said, "I thought I couldn't be wrong about all this."

His voice lowered, "Well, here it is, Marnie. We've known each other two hours and it's as if we've known each other forever. Sometimes life steps up like this—and who are we to try to stop it? It's fantastic. It couldn't happen, but it did. Up to now, we've been marking time, waiting for all this."

He said, "Marnie . . . Marnie. It has a sound like something I've listened for all my life." He took me very gently in his arms and said, "Kiss me, Marnie—just once to make it real. Tomorrow we'll talk to your old man about my honorable intentions."

Simon's laughter from across the hedge jerked me back to reality, and the realization of the meaning of Dan's words jabbed into my mind like sudden sharp spears of light. He didn't know that I was married! He thought . . . oh, what did he think?

I pushed myself out of his arms, forced back tears that stung my lids and then felt them running down through my body in a bitter salty flood of pain. Dan talked as if I were free, as if there were no circlet of diamonds on my left hand!

"You—don't know!" I breathed. "How could you not know that I am Simon Leuder's wife?"

Dan stood still, so suddenly still that he might have turned to bronze by some hideous and fantastic witch's spell.

"He called you Marnie when we were introduced," he said at last. "I thought you were his daughter."

He picked up my left hand and turned it within his own as if he must have proof of the ring to make him believe this horror. While we were still standing there, Simon turned the switch that flooded the garden with a thousand lights. Dan and I stood in the flare of it, with the diamonds of my wedding ring winking up at us like bright malicious eyes.

I heard Simon say, "Oh, there you are, my dear!" Like two people walking in our sleep we turned with the others and moved up the wide stone steps to the house.



**Just before I got into the big car, I heard a woman say, "But she's so *young*!"**

In the days that followed I must have walked a hundred miles across my room and back, across the garden and back, across the wind-swept paddock with the horses following me with their curious soft eyes. Walking, walking, because I couldn't bear to be still, winding my handkerchief around my hand or tearing it to shreds, while I fought the battle that raged within my heart—one side crying that I must go to Dan, the other remembering Deedie at Green Briar, able to walk now a little, improving every day, thanks to the specialists that Simon had engaged . . . Mom in her bronze casket . . . *"Simon is an angel, that's what he is . . ."*

Simon had been an angel. Dad and Mom both slept in earth he owned, in clothing he had bought, in caskets he had chosen. Deedie, her little face alight with happiness so beautiful you couldn't bear it, was learning to walk on legs made straight by Simon's generosity. Simon was an angel, and a devil, binding me to him with shackles of obligation, buying my life because he had more money than he could ever spend, because he wanted a son and I was young and healthy . . .

Dan wrote from the U. where he had resumed his classes in aeronautics, *"We can't let this happen to us, Marnie. We've got to have each other."* He wrote, *"Love like ours comes once in a million years, Marnie. We're fools to let it slip through our fingers. There's always divorce . . ."*

The words of Dan's last letter chanted through my mind for days after it came. Yes, there was always divorce for women who found their lot unbearable. But not for me! I had taken Simon's money, his gifts, his bounty for my loved ones; and I had given him nothing in return.

In my young desperation I began to pray again, the urgent anguished prayers that I had abandoned months before as hopeless. If I could only have a son for Simon, then I could feel

that I had paid my debt to him. Then I could go, be free at last. Oh, I was so young and foolish and ignorant, and so shaken by my love. Because I loathed Simon so, it never seemed to me that I would have any share or interest in this son I was to bear him. I didn't know that a child borne by a woman is a part of her until the day she dies.

IT WAS August, the time of the yearly picnic given by Simon for all his employees, which meant nearly every family in town. There would be games and treats for all the children, a band for dancing down on the shore in an open air pavilion built of new pine boards for the occasion, a huge barbecue pit in which a whole steer would be roasted.

The yearly picnic had always been a high spot in my life and Deedie's in the old days. I remember that Mom always managed new gingham dresses for us both, and that the climax of the day was the moment when Mrs. Leuder, whom we thought of as a sort of queen, drove down the hill and swooped into the clearing on the river shore to distribute treats to all the children in the town.

And now, as Simon's wife, I had to do it. It was Simon's wish that I play the part of Lady Bountiful, go through the farce, knowing all the time that it was simply a show put on to enhance his own self-esteem.

Last year I had gone through it mechanically, hating the display. And this year, as soon as it was over, I threaded my way out of the crowd around the barbecue pit, where the beef was about to be carved. Down by the river a breeze was stirring, and I walked in among the tall old trees, grateful for solitude, allowing the smile I had clamped on my lips to relax.

The day before Dan had written, "*I can't get along without you, Marnie.*" Every time I breathed I could feel the letter push against my breast under my white silk dress. Tears squeezed from my eyes and ran down my cheeks as I walked on and on through the woods, hardly knowing which way I turned, unconscious of the fact that the sun was dropping down behind the hills until I felt the chill of dusk around me.

I came to the old maple Deedie had called the "Wishing Tree," believing that fairies lived in the hollow mossy place beneath the roots. I had carried her here scores of times so we could make the old wish about having new legs to walk on.

As I sat beneath it, I was remembering the feel of her thin little hand gripping mine tight, her eyes closed in concentration as she made her wish, when a deep voice broke into my thoughts and I whirled to face—Dan! He was walking toward me. He was dropping down beside me. He was reaching out a brown hand to take mine.

"Dan—oh, darling!" I sobbed. "I thought it was a dream."

"Marnie!" was all he could say, then, for he was crushing my cupped palms against his lips.

"How did you know where to find me?"

"I saw you leave the crowd, just as I drove up. I followed you."

"If Simon saw you . . ." I breathed unsteadily.

"To hell with Simon!" he said thickly. "We can't go on like this, Marnie. I've come to take you away."

He said, "I'll take you to Reno . . . anywhere. We'll drive all night, all day."

Against my hair his voice broke in a sort of sob as he said, "I—I can't get along without you, Marnie."

Dusk passed and darkness folded down like wings about us, blacking out everything but the mossy glade beneath the spreading branches of the Wishing Tree. There was no sound but the stirring of leaves above us and the running of the river on the rocks. I don't know how long we were there. I only know that the earth must have stopped turning while I waited for Dan's lips to press mine; and after that first kiss nothing mattered but his arms around me and the sweet wild hunger in us both . . .

The moon was shining when Dan lifted me to my feet and wiped my tears away. We turned in silence and walked back through the trees, and just before we came out into the clearing where the bonfires were burning and the band was playing, Dan caught me close again and said, "Throw something into a bag—and hurry. I'll be waiting outside the garden gate at the west end."



**The streetlight flooded over him . . . It was Dan! Dan had come back to me!**

I gripped my hands together, fighting for control.

"I can't go, Dan," I cried in an agony of renunciation. "Not now. Not tonight. I've got to plan it, find a better way to do it. Oh, darling! You've got to understand! Please . . . please wait for me!"

At first he wouldn't listen. But finally he consented to go away, to wait until he heard from me. I clung to him desperately and when he started to say goodbye I pressed my lips hard against his to stop the word. I couldn't bear to hear him speak it.

We walked back into the crowd. We smiled and talked casually, and when he left he said, "All right, Marnie. We'll do it your way. You deal the cards—and I'll play 'em."

After Dan had gone the days moved on again and I walked through them, turning the little treadmill Simon had built for me . . . a dull dinner with his friends who exclaimed (as he had planned that they should do) over the new diamond pendant he had given me . . . a stuffy evening of bridge . . . a sedate drive along the river on Sunday afternoon, while my youth, my love, my longing for Dan tore my heart.

Deedie's last operation had been successful. She would soon be strong enough for the bone graft, and after that there would be months of waiting. But they were certain now that she would walk. Her eyes shone when I went to see her. She said, "Oh, Marnie! Kiss Simon for me, and tell him how I love him for all the things he's done for me." Simon was an angel . . . and a devil!

It was while we were waiting through those anxious weeks after the bone graft that I discovered that I was going to have a baby. My first reaction was pure shock and surprise; and then a strange new hope began to kindle in my heart. A son for Simon . . . and then freedom. I prayed every night, fervently, that it might be a son, that my debt to Simon might be cleared. I could hardly wait for Doctor Wilson to verify my pregnancy.

He looked at me strangely after the examination and said, "I could have been mistaken . . ."

"You mean it isn't true?" I cried. "I'm not going to have a baby?"

"No, no, no, child," he assured me hastily. "I was thinking aloud, my mind was on another patient of mine."

He told me to come back each week for a check-up, gave me a diet list, and I hurried home to tell Simon, buoyed up by the first hope I had known since our marriage. I had expected him to be jubilant, and a fire did kindle suddenly in his cold gray eyes when I blurted out the news that night in his study. He didn't say a word, not a single word. After I had gone I wondered what he was thinking. It was years before I really knew.

I began now to count off the weeks, the slow moving months, like a prisoner counting hours till my release. As soon as the baby was born I'd tell Simon that I must have my freedom. I'd say, "We're square now. I've paid my debt. I've given you a son in exchange for what you've done for Deedie and the folks." It sounded so sensible, so simple as I rehearsed it.

Dan had promised not to write until he heard from me, not to try to see me again until I sent for him. But through Midge Conoly who had taken a job in the Dean's office at the University, I heard news of him.

It began in a letter in which she said, "*Guess who I saw yesterday—Dan Richardson, the handsome chap you introduced to me at the August picnic. Remember? He's a senior in aeronautics and plenty smart.*" After that I grabbed Midge's letters out of the box and searched them through for news of Dan; and when she didn't mention him I was filled for days with a feeling of desolation.

I kept seeing his crooked smile, his mop of shining hair, his warm brown eyes. One night I dreamed that we were back at the Wishing Tree, and woke to find myself in the high walnut bed. I clamped my hand over my mouth to keep from crying out my shock and horror as Simon's hands reached out to draw me close.

I thought the months would never pass, but finally my waiting came

to an end. On a night early in May my baby was born, but not in the high walnut bed where five generations of Leuders had been born. When my time came Doctor Wilson packed me off to the hospital and Simon made no protest.

My first conscious thought when I came out from under the anesthetic was of Dan. I must have been crying his name, for a nurse said soothingly, "Your husband will be allowed to see you in a few minutes. You must rest now. You've had a bad time of it."

My husband! Slowly I returned from the dark places of unconsciousness feeling that I had been with Dan, that he had held my hand through the long hours of my agony. For a moment I seemed to be suspended between two worlds—the one in which I had been with Dan, my hand in his; and that other world of reality and nightmare in which I was Simon's wife.

The nurse was swabbing a place on my arm. I felt the prick of the hypodermic needle.

"Now be a good girl," she told me, "and go to sleep. And when you wake up we'll let you see that fine son of yours."

Son! But of course! That was the reason I must see Dan. I must tell him . . . must tell him. Before I could speak my clouded thoughts the opiate thickened my tongue.

Hours later I woke and lay waiting for something I couldn't name. I lay half-awake, half-asleep when they brought my baby to me and laid him in the crook of my arm. The nurse uncovered his tiny face, a miniature hand that curled instantly around my finger.

Simon came and looked at the baby and went away, but I hardly saw him. The room was heavy with the fragrance of his flowers, but I didn't know their color, Simon had ceased to exist. There was only my baby and me, blue sky through a sunny window, birds singing. I lay there looking down into the sweet sleeping face of my son, forgetting utterly that I had ever thought of him as hostage for my freedom.

I ran my fingers through the mass of ringlets on his head, and the sun fell across the bed, turning them to shining reddish gold. I was alone in the room. The nurse had stepped out, closing the door behind her. There was no one there but myself, so it must have been my own voice that said, "Dan's son—Dan's!"

I can't describe or explain that moment of revelation. I'm only telling it the way it happened to me. From that moment forward I knew that this was the child of Dan's love. And as the weeks rolled by I lost my last flickering doubt that it was so. This child was no kin to the light-haired, loose-mouthed Leuders. My baby's long bones, the contour of his head, his ears, his warm brown eyes that lost so quickly that first vague baby blueness, oh, a thousand things about him marked him as Dan's son.

Hostage to freedom? He was the core of my heart, my very life! And I was caught in a trap woven of my own sin.

I let the weeks and months slide by, feeling like a cheat. I was living a lie, allowing Simon to believe that I had given him the son he wanted more than life. I guess I should have known that I'd be punished for my sin.

Midge wrote: *"I showed Dan Richardson the baby's snapshot you sent*




**Jackie Cooper, Paramount Player, chooses one of the USO approved pullover sweaters.**

Whether he's in the Army, the Navy or the Air Force, he'll love a warm, woolly sweater to wear under his uniform. The following directions are for the sleeveless V-neck pullover sweater which Jackie Cooper wears above.

MATERIALS: 6 skeins (2 oz. skeins) knitting worsted for size 38; 7 skeins for size 40 and 42. 1 pair No. 3 (3 mm. size) knitting pins and 1 pair No. 5 (4 mm. size)

MEASUREMENTS FOR BLOCKING:

Sizes 38 40 42

BACK: With No. 3 needles cast on: 120 sts 124 sts 132 sts

Work in ribbing of k 2, p 2 for 4 inches, decreasing evenly across last row of ribbing 16 sts 14 sts 16 sts

There remain 104 sts 110 sts 122 sts
Change to No. 5 needles and work in stockinette stitch (k 1 row, p 1 row) for 11¼" 11¾" 11¾"

TO SHAPE ARMHOLES: Bind off 7 sts at beginning of next 2 rows. Bind off 3 sts at beginning of following 6 rows. Dec. 1 st at end of each row, until there remain: 66 sts 68 sts 72 sts

Work straight until piece measures, from 1st row of armhole shaping: 9¾" 10¼" 10¼"

To shape shoulders, bind off 9 sts at beginning of next 2 rows. Bind off at beginning of following 2 rows: 8 sts 8 sts 9 sts

Bind off loosely for back of neck, remaining: 32 sts 34 sts 36 sts

FRONT: Work as for Back, until there remain on needle: 72 sts 78 sts 84 sts

With right side facing, work across: 35 sts 38 sts 41 sts

Work over these sts only, decreasing 1 st at armhole edge every other row: 3 times 5 times 6 times

AT THE SAME TIME Dec. 1 st at front edge every 3rd row: 15 times 16 times 17 times

Work over remaining: 17 sts 17 sts 18 sts
until armhole measures same as Back armhole.

To shape shoulder, bind off 9 sts at armhole edge once. Bind off at same edge, remaining: 8 sts 8 sts 9 sts

Attach yarn and work opposite side to correspond.

NECKBAND: With No. 3 needles, cast on 8 sts; work in ribbing of k 1, p 1 for: 22" 23" 23"

Bind off in ribbing. Block to measure: 24" 25" 25"

ARMHOLE BANDS (Make 2): Work as for Neckband for: 20" 21" 21"

Bind off and block to measure: 22" 23" 23"

Block pieces to measurements given. Sew underarm and shoulder seams. Place right side of band on right side of sweater and sew around armhole with close over-and-over stitches, having seam at underarm. Sew neckband as for armhole band; do not join ends of band, but make a seam at center front, forming a V on right side; turn down and sew the two ends on wrong side.

**Girls, do your part in defense: Knit for the boys in service!**

*in your letter, and what do you think? He asked if he could keep it. Imagine that! Most men Dan's age think of babies as just something that takes the crease out of their trousers."* Dan carrying a picture of his son!

After that I filled my letters with the baby—the funny little things he did, hoping she'd share it all with Dan.

*"I'm crazy about that man,"* she wrote in one of her letters. *"I mean Dan. All Winter I've tried to lead up to something, but he always starts talking about gliders. He's out at Shrieber's Airport now, working on some sort of invention . . ."*

Midge in love with Dan! How long could a man go on waiting . . .

I climbed the stairs, tearing Midge's letter to pieces as I went, shaken by the old aching need of Dan. I went into the baby's room and knelt beside his crib, laying my hand across his tiny sleeping form, as if the feel of him could comfort me for the loss of Dan.

Loss of Dan! I was thinking of Dan as if he were gone forever, as if I were never to see him again! I jumped to my feet, trembling all over, as terrified as if I had foreseen some hideous impending doom.

I went to my sitting-room, caught note-paper out of my desk drawer. My hand shook so that I could hardly hold the pen as I wrote: *"Dan darling: I can't go on without you. I love you, live for the sound of your voice, for the remembered touch of your hands . . ."*

The telephone shrilled through the silent house. I heard the voice of Dolly answering. The buzzer on my sitting room extension sounded and I lifted the phone from the cradle. My heart froze. *The sanitarium calling!*

Deedie, still uncertain on her spindly little legs, had leaned out the window of her room to feed some swallows on the sill. She had lost her balance, had plunged to the courtyard below.

I was down the stairs and out of the house, not even waiting for a hat or coat. I didn't know until hours afterward that I was still in grass-stained slacks and an old pullover. I'd been working among the flowers when the postman came with Midge's letter.

I didn't know anything for hours except that Deedie was dying . . . that Deedie was dead.

I RAPPED at Simon's study door and entered at his summons. He got to his feet, sending a grotesque shadow up the wall as he rose and set a chair for me. But I stood behind the chair, gripping the back of it to keep my body from trembling so that he would guess my terror.

"I—I've come to ask you—" I began, and he smiled wryly and reached for his long check book.

"Not that," I told him through lips that were rigid with fear and loathing. How often I had seen him take out his check book like that, as if he could buy anything he wanted.

"I came to ask you for my freedom," I blurted out the words at last. "I want a divorce."

"Freedom?" He repeated the word as if it had no meaning.

"I've got to be free," I cried out passionately. "I'll pay back every cent you've given us, if it takes me the rest of my life . . . but not like this. I can't go on being your wife. It's all such a cruel and terrible mistake. I never loved you. You know that. I didn't know the meaning of love until . . ."

I broke off as he swayed toward me, fell back before him as he lifted his hand. But he didn't strike me. Instead he shoved his hand into the deep pocket of his lounge coat and sank heavily into the chair before his desk.

I was stunned with utter amazement when he said, "Very well. I'll have my lawyer take care of it tomorrow."

I stared at him, unable to believe it. No fury nor violence, no humiliating scene to live through. I turned and walked out of the room and climbed the stairs, stood staring out of the window at the lights of the town below. The night train hooted through the cut below the bag factory. Night train! Sometime I'd be on it . . . on my way to Dan.

The notice of our impending divorce was printed in the *Leuderville Times* . . . Simon Leuder versus Marna Raine Leuder. Of course Simon would want to be the plaintiff, never the defendant. But what difference did it make as long as he gave me my freedom?

Simon had told me that everything had been arranged. He let me think that it would be a simple matter of appearing before the judge, signing papers. I was totally unprepared when I parked my little car outside the courthouse and went in to find a crowded courtroom, a curious crowd clustering like flies around the door.

From there on it was a nightmare that I'd give my life to forget. Simon, from the witness stand, accused me of infidelity. Dolly, the upstairs maid, took the stand next to identify a letter . . . *The letter I had left lying on my desk that day the call came from the sanitarium!*

Simon's lawyer was reading it in a smooth subtle voice that made every word seem vile and shameful: *"Dan darling. I can't go on without you. I love you. I live for the sound of your voice, for the remembered touch of your hands . . ."*

A woman I had never seen before came forward to say that she had seen Dan follow me into the woods that night of the picnic, that she had seen us return two hours later, that she had seen him take me in his arms and kiss me fervently just before we came back to the bonfires.

They called me to the stand and put me through an inquisition that was torture, laying bare before those curious avid people the intimate details of my love for Dan. I'll never forget the murmur that ran through the crowded courtroom just before I fainted. They took me out to an anteroom and brought me back to consciousness. From there I walked out into the sunshine, made my way through a lane cleared by the police with flash bulbs bursting in my face like a volley of shots. People I had known all my life turned their backs upon me and an idler standing beside my car called me an obscene name and spat upon my dress as I climbed in.

At home I rushed to the nursery, caught my baby out of his crib, hugging him close to me. Thank God he was too little to know! And soon now we'd be leaving all this misery and disgrace. A light flashed, a bulb exploded in my eyes. There was a scurry of footsteps in the hall outside the nursery. Somehow a reporter had followed me into the house, had been waiting to get a picture of the baby, innocent victim of this scandal.

The evening paper carried the picture on the front page and under it, staring up at me, were the words that stopped my heart:

*"Simon Leuder, First Citizen of Leuderville, had been granted a*



*divorce from Marna Raine Leuder on grounds of infidelity. He had been granted full custody of the infant child!"*

Custody of the child! Custody of Dan's son! The words spun crazily, became a dark hideous splash of blood before my eyes.

There was only one thing I could do, and I did it. I humbled myself before Simon, as he had planned that I should do, and begged him to take me back so that I could stay with my baby. I swore, with my hand on the Bible he held grimly before me, that I would be a faithful and obedient wife. We were married the second time in the courtroom that had been the scene of my disgrace, and every syllable of the service was a separate horror.

I tried to write to Dan, to explain; but I could find no words to tell my grief. Finally I cut from the evening



**I loathed my husband Simon, but I had to live with him for my little son's sake.**

paper the clipping telling of my remarriage to Simon. Along the newspaper margin I wrote: *"This was the only way I could keep my baby, and I couldn't give him up. Please don't write again or try to see me. If you do, Simon will take the baby away from me forever and that would kill me, Dan. I couldn't bear it."*

WITH grim humor Simon had the baby christened Eros, but I never called him anything but Dannie. One night Simon said, "It should be easier now for you to bear my son," and after that the old nightmare began again. Instead of drinking spasmodically as he had always done, hiding this vice from the world, and his bottle behind a row of books in his study, he now drank habitually. It always seemed strange to me that even this did not change the attitude of the town folk toward him. Perhaps they excused and pitied him as the wronged husband drowning his sorrow in drink.

Child of sin! That's what the older women of the town called Dannie. I knew what lay ahead of him and as soon as he was old enough to understand I told him the truth . . . that first day he came home with his clothes torn and his face scratched and bleeding.

Dannie seemed to have been born with a sort of dignity and courage. After he knew the truth there were plenty of fights, but never any more outraged tears. He learned to walk with his eyes straight ahead, to hold his bronze head high, and to hit hard and straight when he could bear the persecution of this smug little town no longer.

I would have given my life, any time in those bleak years, to have one word with Dan, a single encouraging pressure of his hand. But whenever I thought I must cry out to him for help, I remembered that the court had given Dannie to Simon, to do with as he pleased. That was enough to make me pause, shuddering, and close my lips tight on my outcry. Simon, with a single cruel gesture, could separate Dannie and me.

Midge had written: *"Dan Richardson went East to get financial backing for that invention of his. I know now that he never really saw me, because you were always in his eyes. I guess it's crazy for me to go on loving a man I can never have . . ."*

Crazy to go on loving a man I can never have! Crazy to go on loving Dan, for him to go on loving me . . . and the years and the miles widening between us.

Midge went to California. For a while we corresponded, and then she got married and moved to Hawaii and I lost track of her. My last link of communication with Dan was broken.

Dr. Wilson told Simon, as he had told him years before, that he could never have a child of his own; but Simon cursed him and refused to believe it. His ego wouldn't allow him to believe it; and the nightmare of our life together continued. Years going by . . . oh, I cannot bear to remember them, for each one left its scar deep-etched and livid on my heart.

Dannie was six when Simon suffered his first stroke. They brought him home helpless from the office and from that day forward he would allow no one but myself to attend him. Only when Simon slept did I have a moment with Dannie, and then we would huddle down by the fire in my sitting room, talking in whispers lest Simon wake.

After a while, numbed by fatigue from my long constant vigil, I got so I could look at Simon's twisted face and helpless flabby body, I could even touch him without recoiling with the old sick revulsion. I even grew to pity him, for you can't go on despising a person who lies helpless under your hands day after slow day, month after slow month.

One morning in the third year of his illness, he woke and motioned for the nurse to call me. As I went to him, I was frightened by his gaunt, gray face. I knelt by the bed and said softly, "Yes, Simon?" He clutched my hand. Desperately, he tried to lift his body up. His breath came faster, rasped. "Forgive me Marnie, I must have been mad, crazed by jealousy because you gave another man the son I couldn't have. . . ." Suddenly he slumped back on the bed and the hand I held grew limp. I cried for the nurse to come—but it was too late. Simon was dead. All his money couldn't bring him back.

IT WAS the largest funeral Leuderville had ever seen. A cordon of police was necessary to hold back the crowd. A bugler sounded taps, Spanish War veterans fired a volley into the still April sky, and school children who had formed a Guard of Honor filed past and dropped their wilted flowers on the grave. The plan for all this had been found in Simon's will. Even in death he must have the stage set to please his vanity.

Suddenly I began to laugh and couldn't stop. I laughed and laughed, looking up through my black veil, crying my pent-up anguish to the sky until I was swallowed up in darkness.

I woke on a hospital bed, with little Dannie holding my hand.

"You're all right now, Mommie," he told me. "You're always going to be all right—from now on."

I said, "Tell the nurse to bring my clothes. We're leaving Leuderville on the night train."

Night train hooting through the cut below the factory! And Dannie and I and our bags on it. We left the white house as it stood, knowing that we'd never go back. In Seattle we both got jobs—Dannie delivering groceries after school; I in the back room of a dress shop, making alterations. I knew a lot about clothes, learned from my years of being Simon's show-piece. In a few weeks I was out in front selling. My beauty, of which Simon had been so proud, helped me in my job. I knew clothes and I knew how to wear them. I became a model in the smartest shop in town. Dannie said, "You're pretty beautiful, Mom."

One night he said, "This fellow—my Dad. Where is he?"

"I don't know, Dannie," I told him, with the old hand closing on my heart. "I—I guess I'm afraid to look—for him."

It was the first time I had put my fear into words. The crushed, beaten years had done something to me. Where once I would have rushed headlong to Dan, turning the world upside down in a passionate effort to find him, now I was held back by fear—fear that he might have changed. Suppose he didn't want me any more? Suppose—oh, suppose there were someone else now.

I spoke the words aloud to Dannie and he said, "But suppose he's still waiting for you, the way he said."

That's the way our search started. I went to Shrieber's Airport where I knew that he had worked after leaving college, but the place had changed hands and no one there remembered him. I went up to the University and talked with teachers who had known him, but there were so many students, years of students passing through. Only one of the professors remembered him enough to tell me that he had written him from New Jersey on that trip East. After that he had lost track of him. East and then South, and then where? The trail ended always like this. I even inserted an ad in the personal column of newspapers in every large city across the country, knowing all the time that Dan would never see them. Imagine Dan thumbing through the Personals, reading about faith healers and fortune tellers and reducing baths!

That's the way the months passed. I went on modelling, with my cheeks fuller now and my hair piled in curls

on my head. And we went on looking for Dan, driving always into dead-ends of disappointment. And then one night Dannie was thumbing through the paper when he saw the ad. Afterward he said it jumped right up and hit him between the eyes:

> "*Wanted: Financial backing for revolutionary experiment in aviation. Ten to one chance of success. Call Glenwood 434C, or write Rusty Richardson, Jute's Barn. . . .*"

Dannie was already at the telephone, calling the number. He said, "Here, you take it, Mom. I wouldn't know what to say."

I'll never forget the suspense of that moment while I waited, and the let-down of it when a drawling southern voice answered, "Yes ma'am, this is Jute's barn. The boss isn't here just now. He's gone to town. The boss's name? Dan Richardson, but no one ever calls him anything but Rusty. Say, you wouldn't be calling about the ad, would you?" His voice suddenly leaped to attention, but I had hung up. "It's Dan," I murmured through stiff lips.

I wanted to go alone to Dan. All night I tramped the floor, torn by mingled hope and fear. After all the years, would Dan still love me, want me? Would everything be the same or irrevocably changed? In the other room Dannie slept soundly. Youth can sleep.

Toward dawn I called a cab, set the alarm so it would waken Dannie in time for school, and slipped out of the house. The sun was rising when we bumped down a side road and came to rest before a ramshackle barn with the burned remnants of a plane standing in the yard. Another plane, a spindly monoplane of ancient vintage, stood in a field on the other side and the tallest man I had ever seen stood squinting at the sky as I approached.

His voice, answering my inquiry, identified him as the man to whom I had talked on the phone the night before. "Yes Ma'am!" he snatched off a greasy mechanic's cap, "The boss'll be right down."

"Yep," he indicated a small speck soaring high in the sky above the fields. "He's up in the Spider, trying out the new—" He broke off suddenly as if he were betraying a secret and looked at me suspiciously while I tried to believe that the tiny lost speck in the sky was Dan.

The lank man beside me was saying, "You wouldn't be the lady who called last night about the ad, would you?"

When I nodded, he seemed electrified. He shouted excitedly toward a door at the back of the barn, "Hey, Louise, come on out here! There's a lady came to see about the loan."

I noticed then the length of rusty stove pipe that protruded from the barn roof, the two curtained windows, the open door through which a woman was hurrying to greet me—a woman with the most beautiful clear blue eyes I had ever seen and a body that moved like music in her faded blue skirt.

One moment she was coming toward me and the next her eyes flipped up to the sky, as if drawn there by instinct. She uttered a little whimpering cry and then she was running toward the open field, stumbling, her eyes still on the sky, and the man was running too, staring upward with her at the tiny distant speck wheeling down, spinning crazily down through space.

I stood paralyzed for a moment before I stumbled after them, to stop again and stand there staring while Dan—it must be Dan—whirled toward the earth.

"Bail out, fellah," I heard the mechanic gritting through his teeth.

I felt as if my eyes were red hot coals burning holes in my head, as I stood there with the others, staring into the sun. The plane kept coming down, and with a sickening crash bumped crazily across the field and finally slid to a stop, leaning over on one wing.

I started to run toward him, as I saw Dan stagger out of the plane and fall. But I stopped dead still, as if I had been turned to stone. The other woman was before me, running, sobbing, "Rusty! Oh, Rusty, darling! Are you all right?"

I stood there watching her run to him, put her arms around him, turn anxious and cradle his head, run loving hands over his face. A cold hand seemed to clutch at my heart. She loved him!

When finally I saw her smile, I knew he wasn't hurt, and I turned blindly and hurried back across the field to the waiting cab.

I told myself savagely, "You knew it might be like this. You promised to be a good sport about it." I set my teeth upon my lip to bite the tears back and said savagely, "At least you had the courage to come away before he knew." But all the time I knew that I had run away, not to spare Dan this painful reunion, but because I could not bear to meet him face to face, to see his eyes close, to hear his voice.

I WENT to the shop, feeling like a sleep-walker. I couldn't bear to call Dannie, but he came to the shop at lunchtime.

"Did you find him?" he blurted at once, and I realized what terrible suspense had been his.

"I found him." My voice seemed to sink down into my throat as I groped for words. "But I didn't go near enough to talk to him. There was—someone else, Dannie. You know we said it might be—like that."

I heard Dannie's muffled exclamation. And then I forced myself to be brisk and matter-of-fact. I told him I'd have to work late to make up the time I had lost that morning, that I wouldn't be home for dinner. "Okay, Mom. Can I go to the movies then?"

All day between my eyes and what I was doing, I kept seeing a plane coming down in a dusty field. I kept hearing a woman's voice crying, "Rusty! Oh, Rusty, darling! Are you all right?"

It was late when I dragged myself home. I closed the gate behind me and walked up the path to the little house, noting dully as I went that the flowers needed water. A shadow had leaped from the porch swing as the gate clicked shut and I called out: "Dannie, the flowers are dry—why didn't you turn on the sprinkler?"

The long shadow was plunging toward me down the steps. The corner streetlight flooded over him.

"Marnie!" A deep voice was speaking, long hands were reaching out to me.

"Dan!" I sobbed aloud, unable to believe it; and then his arms were around me and everything else was forgotten as if it had never been. The woman on the field was a dream, a nightmare. There was no reality but Dan's arms, the dear cool feel of his face against mine, our tears mingling together.

Afterward, in the little house that had suddenly come alive, Dan told me how he had seen me as I ran from the field, how he would have known me anywhere this side of heaven.

"Why did you run away, Marnie?" he demanded, catching me close again.

"I thought that woman—well, who is she, anyway?"

"Louise?" he laughed, tilting his head back in the old way I remembered. "You thought Louise—Gosh! Louise loves me, sure, and I love her." My heart skipped a beat before he went on. "She's taken care of Tex and me ever since we were partners on this invention. Louise is always there to patch us up after a crash and feed us, somehow, when there's nothing to cook. She's Tex's wife."

The tall mechanic's wife! I leaned against Dan, laughing and crying all at once in my relief.

After a while Dan told me how he had traced me through the cab company. Tex had noted the license number before we drove away. It had been as simple as that after all the years of futile searching. For Dan had been searching, too. All through the years he had been steadfast to his promise to "play the cards my way." He had taken a Leuderville paper, hoping always for bits of news about me. When he had read of Simon's death, he had returned to Leuderville, only to find that I had gone away, leaving no forwarding address.

Oh, how can I put into words the deep sweet renewal of our love, the beating hope and happiness that surged through us as we renewed the old pledges, repeating them over and over, as if we could never hear them enough!

"You wouldn't be crying, would you, Marnie?" Dan said at last, his lips against mine.

"Not now—oh, not any more, Dan," I whispered shakily. "This is the end of my tears."

And then Dannie came home, came leaping up the porch steps, plunging into the living room. I'll never forget the way their eyes met and held, the sudden vise of their hands meeting, the way neither of them spoke. It was as if they were old friends, with a thousand shared things between them that could never be spoken in words.

It was Dan who insisted that we marry at once. He made arrangements with Louise to take care of Dannie while we went on a honeymoon. Dannie was tickled to be able to hang around the planes with Tex.

THAT was a year ago. Dan has put aside his beloved experiment and is working in an airplane factory. The basement is littered with his work and whenever Dan has time, he and Dannie toil together at it, their bronze heads bent beneath the light, their brown, deep eyes intent.

One eager happy year has passed, yet I remember every moment of that evening of reunion when Dan came back to me—every flash of his crooked smile, every word, every burst of sudden laughter. On a clean separate page in my memory they are recorded—these priceless things I hungered for through endless years of anguish.

THE END

# I Tried to Conceal My Guilt

*Continued from page 23*

the house and closed the door with a bang.

I stood there a moment. Yes, how could he, I thought violently to myself. And how could a man go on living when the girl he loved didn't even know he existed? I wanted to snatch her into my arms, crush her to me, shout at her, "Look at me! I'm here. I'm a man. I love you—I want you!"

Our house was a different place now. Mother and Father seemed crushed by what had happened to Ron. Not once did I hear them say anything about Ron's being only their adopted son anyway.

Ronnie never came home again, but Fritzie came in often, which was rather strange since it was obvious that Father and Mother could barely tolerate her. But that didn't faze her any. She made herself right at home in our house, and her manner with me was very familiar. At first I was disgusted. The cheap little flirt! Even though she had managed to snare Ron, she was still highly interested in anything that wore pants.

"Why don't you come over and see me, Arnie?" she pouted. "Ron's always gone, and I get pretty lonesome. Don't be so high-hat. Drop in on me—anytime."

I had heard whispers downtown that other fellows were "dropping in—anytime." Ron had certainly got himself into a fine mess. Then Fritzie started sitting out on her porch about the time I came home from work every evening. She would wave at me as I drove by and I would wave back. I could have gone home another way, but I didn't.

I tried to tell myself afterward that a combination of circumstances drove me to do what I did, but I know now that I let myself drift weakly into trouble. It was a torment to have Kathie living so close, yet hardly ever catching a glimpse of her. It was a torment to know that Fritzie was close, too, waiting—and easy.

I PUT my car in the garage for repairs one evening and walked home from the office; walked home past Fritzie's house. And when I accepted Fritzie's invitation to come into the house I knew I was being a fool, but the blaze in my blood drove me on.

It was a shabby little house, and it fitted its shabby little mistress. She poured a couple of drinks for us and settled herself on the divan. "I was beginning to think my big brother didn't like me," she pouted.

I followed her lead and kidded her along for a while. It was getting dark when I said, "What time does Ron get home? I thought I might see him before I leave."

Fritzie tossed her head. "You'll have to stay all night if you expect to see him. Sometimes he doesn't come home at all. Besides, I thought you came to see me." She got up to pour another drink, and as she passed me, she rumpled my hair playfully.

My brain was a little fogged, and I said to myself, "There's still time to go home, you fool." But I stayed on. When it was dark, Fritzie turned on one very soft light. She sat down on the divan again and smiled at me.

Suddenly I was beside her, my mouth seeking hers. I was twenty, I had never had a girl in my arms like this before, and the madness of it set me afire. Her arms went around me, and she pulled me close to her. After that there was nothing in my mind but blinding desire.

Then Fritzie's hands tightened and she whispered, "Ron!" Only then was I aware that the door was open. I could see the figure of a man outlined faintly against the night.

There was a shot—a spurt of orange flame, a crash that nearly broke my eardrums. That was the first time I'd ever heard the whistle of a bullet. Great God! Ron was shooting at me! I leaped up, intent on getting out of the house. Ron's body blocked my passage and I grappled with him. There was another shot. Fritzie kept screaming Ron's name.

I reached for the gun; my hand closed on Ron's wrist. Ron struggled like a tiger, but my hand eventually closed over the gun. As I wrested the gun from his hand, one of my fingers touched the trigger, and there was another shot. I heard a funny gurgling sound, then I realized that Fritzie had stopped screaming. Ron pulled free of me, and we stood staring helplessly at each other. Fritzie lay on the floor and there was a great spreading stain on the front of her dress.

Ron's eyes looked the same as they had looked that night Fritzie and her father had come to the house; as if he were dying. "I didn't know it was you—I guess I went crazy," he said hoarsely. "Other men have been here with her. I bought a gun today. I meant to put a stop to it."

I was trembling so I couldn't speak. I went over and knelt beside Fritzie, knowing before I touched her that she was dead. That last shot had killed her; she had been screaming up to that time. The gun had been in my hand when the last shot was fired. Fear choked in my throat.

I looked up at Ron and saw that he was holding the gun in his hand, wiping it with a handkerchief. Then he gripped the gun firmly, leaving clear impressions of his fingerprints. Suddenly he snapped off the lights and I could hear him locking the front door. His voice came quietly through the darkness, "Go out the back door and go home. Be careful that no one sees you. The neighbors will probably be coming over any minute."

"What are you going to do?" I whispered.

"Call the police and tell them about this." He sounded old and tired. "That's all there is to do. There's no need of you being mixed up in this. Fritzie caused enough trouble without you being dragged into it."

I couldn't help the feeling of relief that surged up in me. "But I shot her!" I stammered. "I can't let you take the blame—"

Ronnie broke in quickly, "Do as I say, Arnold. You'd get a life sentence or maybe the electric chair for this. I might be acouitted beeause Fritzie was my wife. There's the unwritten law, you know, and the neighbors will testify that Fritzie had men here." He stopped to listen. "Someone's coming up the steps! Get out the back door quick! Go on, Arnold! Think of the folks. They've been through enough with me; it'd kill them if they found out you were mixed up with Fritzie."

I slid out through the back door and crept across the dark yard. Hugging the shadows I made my way home slowly. Thank God, my parents had gone out somewhere that night. I let myself into the house and sat for a long time in the darkness, living over and over that scene in Ron's house.

I remembered the feel of Fritzie's hot flesh beneath my hands, the sudden, paralyzing fear as I saw Ron standing in the doorway; then the crash of the shot, the spurt of flame, the whistling sound of the bullet. And the greatest horror of all, Fritzie lying there, the stain spreading over her breast.

I walked around the dark living room, stopping at the window to glance over at Kathie's house. How would Kathie feel when she heard about Fritzie's death? What would she think if she knew I were there? Ron was free now. Free of Fritzie at least. Kathie might take him back if he were acquitted. On the other hand, he might not be acquitted—but I didn't dare let myself think about that.

There was my chance to do something big, but I refused to consider it. I could have exonerated Ronnie, taken my punishment for the murder, left Kathie and Ron alone with their love. But my selfish heart cried out against that. Ronnie had had so much, everyone had admired him and loved him—and I had had nothing. Besides, I tried to tell myself, he had come home with a gun—he had every intention of killing someone.

I went to bed and pretended to be asleep when my parents came home. But there was no sleep for me that night, and by morning I was nearly crazy. I rose early, bathed and shaved, and stood before the mirror striving to compose my face into a mask of indifference.

The news came with the morning paper. I could hear Father shouting in a hoarse voice, then a little sobbing



**I could have saved Ron from jail . . . but if I had I would have lost Kathie for good.**

scream from Mother. I rushed downstairs, hating myself for the farce I was acting out. I seized the paper and read the story, trying to look shocked and sorrowful.

We went down to the jail to talk to Ronnie. Tears came to his eyes when Mother put her arms around him. I stood there in frozen silence as he explained how it had happened. He had bought a gun, he had come home to find someone in the house with Fritzie. He had shot at the fellow and one of the bullets had struck Fritzie. The man had run out the back door, and Ron didn't have any idea who he was.

When we left Ron at last, I breathed a sigh of relief. Father and Mother were taking it hard. I wondered if they would have taken it so hard if it had been I who was in trouble. All the old self-pity flooded over me. Mother had never loved me as she had loved Ron, I told myself. Ron had everything and I had nothing.

A WEEK after the murder, Kathie's folks took her on a trip, and I was thankful that she wouldn't be there for the trial. It was tough on Ron, though. He seemed to wither up when he found out that Kathie had left town. I know he must have been hoping that he could win her back somehow.

The weeks that followed were hell for me, but my grief was nothing compared to what Ron was going through. A dozen times I made up my mind that I would confess my part in that fatal scene. But always in the background was Kathie. In spite of everything, I couldn't give up the hope that some day Kathie would be mine.

I was in a turmoil of doubt and indecision. Ron grew thinner and paler all the time. Day after day he slumped in his chair in the courtroom, his hands folded, his head sunk on his chest. The old gallant, charming Ron was gone. He didn't care any more after Kathie went away without a word to him.

The last day of the trial came, and I sat there sweating, clenching my hands, trying to make up my mind. Ron's lawyers had pleaded that Fritzie was a loose woman, they invoked the unwritten law, they said that it was a case of justifiable homicide.

The jury went out. My brain kept shouting, "Get up and tell them now, you fool! Tell them you were there. Tell them you fired that last bullet. Let them take you instead of him." But something else whispered, "Maybe he'll be acquitted. It's too late to tell now. They wouldn't believe you anyway."

They gave him five years. I was floored when I heard it. Mother was sobbing and Father was trying to comfort her. Ron was led out, pale and silent. That night I cried for the first time since childhood. Cried over the ruin of Ron's life and my own cowardice.

I went to see him once before they took him to the state penitentiary. He smiled at me, the old gentle smile, and his first words were "Has Kathie come home yet?"

When I told him she hadn't, he handed me a letter. "Give that to her when she comes home, will you, Arnold?"

I stood there looking at him through the bars, and suddenly I felt I couldn't bear it any longer. "I didn't think they'd convict you, Ronnie," I whispered. "I wouldn't have let you do it. I was to blame. It wasn't an accident—my going to see Fritzie, I mean. I meant to—"



**I watched Kathie carefully, and day by day I knew her love for me was growing.**

"Don't talk about it," Ronnie said. "It's better this way. They'd have given you the chair. Five years isn't long—with time off for good behavior." He tried to smile. "There's something you can do for me, Arnold. Take care of Kathie. Talk to her about me, try to convince her that I love her. Ask her to wait for me."

I left the jail with those last words ringing in my ears. *"Take care of Kathie! Ask her to wait for me!"* He couldn't have requested anything that would have been harder for me to fulfill.

Several months went by before Kathie came home. And when she came I could see that the change had done her good. She was able to laugh again, and the roses had come back to her cheeks. Far in the brown depths of her eyes lay a sadness which time could never wipe out, but she was more like her old self than she had been since Ron's marriage. I waited for her to speak of Ron, but, when she didn't, I followed her cue and decided she didn't want to talk about him.

I didn't give her Ron's letter. Again and again I tried to bring myself to do it. She seemed happy now. It would only make her unhappy if I were to remind her of Ron, I told myself. That wasn't the reason at all, of course. I wonder now how I could have done such a thing to Ron. He had saved my life, he was taking my punishment, and I repaid him by stealing the one thing he had left—Kathie's love.

I read the letter he had written to Kathie. It was heartbreaking. In it he poured out all his love; he begged her to understand how he had got involved with Fritzie; he asked her to write to him in prison.

I set out to win her love. Carefully and faithfully I started doing little things for her, taking her places where she enjoyed herself most, making it clear to her in every way that I worshipped her. The months away from Centerville had changed her; I think that even her attitude toward me had changed. She liked me better now, and while I knew she would never care for me as she had cared for Ron, still it was better than nothing.

After a year, she finally agreed to marry me. I could hardly wait for the day to come. Almost two years now since Ron had gone to prison. Father and Mother went to see him once a week, but I couldn't bring myself to go. I had acquired some of the things I had always envied in Ron. Centerville liked and respected me. I was about to win Kathie, but somehow my burden of guilt didn't grow any lighter.

I began to worry a little about the time when Ron would be released from prison. Would he come back? Did Kathie still love him? But she must know it was almost time for him to be released, allowing for time off for good behavior, and yet she had promised to marry me. I consoled myself with the thought that Ron would never come home.

KATHIE AND I were married in June, and we spent a two-week honeymoon at a mountain resort. I'll never forget that first night we arrived at the hotel. I had had our room filled with flowers, and when Kathie saw them she was delighted. "Oh, Arnold, you're sweet to me," she said. Suddenly a deep sense of humility and tenderness came over me.

I pulled her into my lap, and my voice was husky when I spoke. "Kathie, darling, I'll spend my life making you glad you married me. I love you so, I'd even kill for you!" I know I paled at the words. I had said them as everyone has said them —unthinking—but for me they were the naked truth. I don't think Kathie noticed how white I went, for she just put her cheek against mine and whispered, "I love you too, Arnold."

We moved into a new little house and began our life together. It was a sweet and wonderful thing. I watched Kathie carefully, and day by day I knew that her love for me was deepening. Ron might have been the love of her youth, but I was the love of her maturity.

But sometimes at night, I would awaken, cold with fear, and I could almost see the horrible scene that followed Fritzie's death; the scene I sneaked from like a coward I was —Ron, suddenly old and haggard, numbly watching them carry away Fritzie's limp body. But as the months passed, even that nightmare faded.

I might have known, though, that Ron would come back, that the thing was not yet finished. I had thought I could marry Kathie and write happy ending to the whole thing, without her ever knowing about my own guilt concerning Fritzie's death. We had been married almost a year and Kathie had just told me a few days before that she was to have a baby.

I had been living in a fool's paradise, kidding myself along. I didn't believe Ronnie would come back to Centerville when he was let out. He had told Kathie in the letter that he would wait for her to write to him, but since she had never received the letter, of course she hadn't written. I told myself that she was in love with me now, and had forgotten all about Ronnie.

I came home one night to find him in my house. Cold terror crept over me as I saw him sitting there. He was thin and pale, but he was still a handsome man.

"Hello, Arnold," he said quietly.

I glanced at Kathie and found her staring at me as if she had never seen me before. I sank into a chair, groping for something to say to Ron. "It's nice to have you home again," I said. "I suppose it seems pretty nice to you."

"Yes. Mother told me about your marriage to Kathie. I kept watching for letters from you, but I guess they must have gotten lost."

Ron was angry. He and Kathie had had time to talk it all over before I got home. Had he told her everything? My mind clutched frantically at straws. Kathie couldn't leave me now. She was my wife; she was going to have my child.

Ron's next words came out bitterly, "I trusted you! You never gave her my letter! I took your punishment; I went to prison because you were more than a brother to me! And this is what I get! The minute I was out of the way, you stole my girl!"

Again I glanced at Kathie's stony face. My voice was little more than a whisper, "I loved her myself. I loved her from the first moment I saw her. I couldn't bear to give her up as long as there was a chance for me. Kathie, say something! Tell me what you're thinking!"

Kathie said in a low tone, "I thought Ron was a murderer. I knew I could never marry him with that between us." Her voice broke and she cried out, "Oh, Arnold, how could you do this to me? You knew I loved him! You could have set everything right. You could have told me that you—caused Fritzie's death. I wouldn't have told anyone—and it would have set things right between Ron and me. I can't help it—I still love him!" Tears streamed down her cheeks and she buried her face in her hands.

Have you ever felt as if all the world was falling away from you and you were left standing alone on a hot dry desert? That's how I felt. All my dreams and hopes and happiness were swept away by Kathie's words. I had built my house of life on a foundation of lies and deception, and now the whole structure was crumbling beneath me.

"What are you going to do?" I asked Ron.

There was pity in his eyes as he stood up. "We're going to let Kathie decide about this thing," he said. "She knows all the facts now. She's your wife and she's going to have your child. That has to be considered. I'm going to stay here in town until she has decided. Oh, you needn't worry, Arnold! I won't do anything to hurt your precious reputation. That's all in the past. I don't want revenge. I only want what belongs to me—Kathie!"

After he had gone, Kathie went into the bedroom and I heard the click of the lock. She didn't want to talk to me, didn't even want to see me. I stood at the door and called her name, begged her to talk to me, but there was no sound. Finally, I turned away and went out of the house, my head reeling as I considered the sudden wreckage of my life.

I walked for hours, trying to come to some conclusion, trying to face the possibility that Kathie might go out of my life. And with her she would take my child. That child was the only hope I had left. It was the only thing that might keep Kathie with me.

It was late when I went home. I felt a little better now. Maybe things weren't as bad as I had thought. The house was dark. Kathie was probably brooding there in the darkness, I thought. But I found the bedroom door open. The house was empty. A note was stuck in the mirror. *"Arnold, I have gone to my mother's. Will let you know later what I am going to do. Please don't try to see me. Kathie."*

I went on with my life, concealing my agony as I had concealed my guilt. I couldn't cry out to the world that another man had stolen my wife. I couldn't say a word to anyone. My parents asked gentle questions about Kathie and I answered the best I could. Ron was staying with the folks now—and right next door was Kathie.

THREE months later Kathie sued me for divorce. She wrote me a letter—I still have it. Some of its sentences are engraved on my memory. She said that she and her mother were going out to the West Coast and Ronnie was going with them. He had a job there and as soon as the divorce was final, they would be married. And at the last she said, *"I want you to know that I have forgiven you, Arnold, and that neither Ronnie nor I will hold any bitterness for you, I want to be fair about everything. I promise you that as soon as our child is old enough, I shall allow it to live with you for six months out of every year."*

Well, that's all I've got to look forward to. My son is three years old now, and maybe in another three years, I shall see him for the first time. I've never heard directly from Kathie and Ronnie, but some day I hope to see both of them again. I hope to feel once more the firm grip of Ronnie's hand, to see in Kathie's eyes the warm light of friendship.

I've got what I always wanted—the admiration of Centerville. But that admiration has an ashy taste in my mouth. When Ronnie took my wife, all Centerville hovered over me in sympathy. After the murder, Ronnie was no longer an idol. I took his place. My father has passed away, and I inherited his business. To Centerville I am an eligible young man with an unhappy past and a thriving business.

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## "Forgive Me, Greg!"

***Continued from page 26***

That afternoon, walking through the autumn brightness of Indian Canyon, I began to learn.

His parents had fled Russia during the Revolution, had finally settled here in Bristol when Dr. Vladmir was appointed head of the Philosophy Department at the university. Their life was filled with music and books and study. Greg had received his B. A. at nineteen, was now working for his M. A.

So we were just the same age . . . in years!

"I'll graduate next Spring. I could have had a scholarship if I'd needed it, because I was valedictorian of my high-school class," I hurried to tell him. Then wondered why. I'd expected Greg, as any other boy in his position would have done, to try to put himself on a footing with me. Instead here I was trying to show him that I could match his standards!

"Good!" His hand tightened on mine. "You have a brilliant mind in a beautiful body. You are blessed of the gods, Lorraine."

Where then were my petty values? My humiliation that he'd been so crudely dressed. My apprehension about explaining this outrageous "picnic" date to the gang. Where were they when I walked beside Greg? . . . Forgotten.

I had glimpsed a way of life that meant something. You believed in things and worked for them. Real things.

When I was with Greg the part of me that had been buried these many years came to life. Our minds met and our hearts met. I felt that, if my world hadn't been shattered just when I was growing up, I might have been like Greg. I might have really studied and done some serious writing. I might even have saved my kisses . . .

But it was too late now. I knew that—I knew it from the first—and yet I wouldn't say it.

I could have told Greg then and saved his dreams. It would have hurt him—but it wouldn't have broken his heart.

We would have been friends and worked together. We might even have learned to love. But it would have been a knowing love. Greg wouldn't have put me on a pedestal!

I LET Greg build his dreams around me while I—I was making fun of him! Oh, not in my heart. Not really. But I had to explain him somehow to my crowd. To save my own petty pride. Or should I say snobbishness.

At the House, I called Greg "The Rover Boy," told the other girls they had no idea how refreshing it was to get back to Nature. I couldn't let them know I was really interested in Greg—they'd think I was crazy!

So I made a joke of it and fooled them into accepting my incredible dates with him. Stu laughed the loudest. He wasn't jealous . . . or was he?

I studied him across the table of the night-club where we were dining. His eyes swept the revealing curves of my white satin formal, gleaming with the anticipation of abandoned kisses. But was there any love in them? Could we be in love when we spoke of getting married only casually—as something we might do some day?

Stu had other dates and I didn't mind. How would I feel if Greg had another girl—swift resentment shook through me. "Jeepers!" I wondered, "am I actually falling in love with that—that boy!

But I *couldn't* be. Greg was just something new. It flattered me to have

**I was ashamed to let anyone know I was in love with Greg!**



Greg's cheeks were bright with color from the long walk he'd taken before he called for me. He could hardly eat for talking. About me, about us, about writing.

"I know I can write a novel now," he declared. "A good one!"

"He's been threatening that novel for years." Dr. Vladmir's eyes were twinkling. "And always he would say—'There is something missing. Before a man can really write, I think he must love.'

"And I would say to him, 'Well then, get your nose out of your books and go find love!'

"Then he would say—" Dr. Vladmir smiled broadly, mimicking Greg's intent way of speaking— " 'You don't go find love. It comes to you.' "

"That's true!" Greg laughed with us, but he wasn't at all taken aback by his father's teasing. "I always knew that there would be only one woman for me, that some day I'd find her—and so it was."

After the dishes were cleared away, Mrs. Vladmir got out her violin and Greg accompanied her. They played haunting Russian music, full of fire and sadness. It completed the spell which these hours had cast over me.

The professor sat beside me on the couch and it didn't seem strange that he should hold my hand. And I kept noticing how he looked at his wife. His eyes were so proud—so full of love. After all these years of marriage.

By all the standards to which I'd paid homage the Vladmirs had nothing. No money, no social position, no sophistication. Yet they seemed to have everything. They worked and lived and loved—and what more was there?

his absolute adoration. It was only "fun." I made myself think that.

That night, when Stu came dashing in with the new issue of *"Script,"* I wanted to snatch it out of his hands. Some of Greg's poetry was probably in it. Stu was going to read it to the whole bunch here in the living room so they could jibe at it.

"This is priceless!" Stu shouted, and dropped on the couch beside me, flipping open the magazine to the editorial page. He began to read: *"A man must have these things: his work, his ideals, and an eternal love."*

My cheeks went fiery as an hilarious shout went up, but I managed a stiff smile.

I was furious with them for their sneers. I was furious with myself for letting them laugh. I was furious with Greg, too, for wearing his heart on his sleeve.

There was another feeling, too, mixed up with all the others. A glow of pride. For I knew Greg had dedicated those words to me and no woman could have helped feeling thrilled. Any woman who hadn't been spoiled by years of false living would have been proud to acknowledge a love which proclaimed itself so openly and so beautifully.

Still I tried to fool myself. Greg was just lavishing on me the adoring first love of a boy who has spent his life witb books. He'd never really known any other girls—that was why he thought me so wonderful. It would wear off. . . . It couldn't really be love anyhow. Greg had never even kissed me!

Suddenly I was wide-awake, staring out my bedroom window, over the starlit snow. How would it feel to have Greg's arms around me? What would his kiss be like?

When Greg did kiss me . . .

It was the stormy March day when I went to the Vladmirs for dinner. I dressed carefully, choosing a gray wool dress which accented the gleaming darkness of my hair.

Dr. Vladmir peered at me fondly though his heavy glasses, patting my head as if I were a little girl. Mrs. Vladmir kissed me on both cheeks. "We're so happy that Greg has found you," she whispered, as she tied an apron around me.

I mashed fiercely at the potatoes, for her eyes had the same guileless look as Greg's and her softly-lined cheeks were pink with the pleasure of having me help her with the dinner.

An unfamiliar lump rose in my throat. My mind went back to the Sunday dinners we used to have at home before Mother divorced Dad. She and I would help the cook sometimes and it was fun. We used to read the papers afterward, maybe go riding. We'd been a real family then, had a real home. Afterward—nothing was ever the same.

Not until today had I again felt that warm feeling of affection and protection. They were so happy to have me here—and it was so *nice*. I felt as if I were finding something which I'd lost so long ago.

When Greg made the toast at dinner: "To the girl I love," my eyes filled with tears and I could hardly swallow.

THAT'S the way I was feeling when Greg's parents left us alone. He stood while they went out, then he turned to me. His cheeks flushed, then paled. Abruptly, he dropped to his knees before me. *On his knees.* Oh, Greg! Nobody else could have done that. I wanted to laugh and I wanted to cry.

"Lorraine, I know I'm not worthy of you. No man is ever worthy of a pure and beautiful woman. . . ."

I let you say it, Greg, when I should have cried out to stop you.

"I want you to be my wife."

And your eyes were like blue flame, burning away all of my pretenses.

"I love you, Greg." It was my own fervent voice. Those were my tears dropping on your upturned palms. And it was my body that came so vibrantly alive. Just the touch of his hands on my arm stirred me.

He looked down at me and his eyes became black with something wild in them. Then they softened. His lips lowered to mine. Tenderly.

A kiss as soft as the brush of angel's wings—and as enchanting.

It was not until morning that reality flooded back on me. I had promised to marry Greg!

Getting ready for classes, eating and chatting with the girls in the familiar luxury of the sorority house, yesterday seemed impossible.

I *couldn't* really love Greg! I'd just been carried away by—by what? Memories of a home I once had. The Vladmirs gracious way of living. Mad music. And Greg . . . the way he looked. The touch of his hands.

I *had* thrilled to him. But that didn't mean I could marry him. What

would Dad say to a boy who had no money and no interest in getting any? What would my friends say if I married a *poet?*

When I was with Stu and the crowd, Greg seemed impossible. When I was with Greg, everything else seemed unimportant.

So, in a desperation of uncertainty, I let things go on until Easter vacation. Greg knew I had to talk to Dad before we could really become engaged. At home that week, I could think it over, away from everybody.

Just before we were to leave, Friday afternoon, Stu threw his usual end-of-the-term party in his Indian Canyon cabin. I went because—well, I don't know. I just did.

It was a beautiful day, fragrant warm—the first real promise of spring. I felt curiously restless. Maybe that's why I drank too much—or maybe it was just because the others were getting pretty wild and I had to follow them. When Stu dragged me over to a chair and pulled me into his lap, I didn't protest.

I felt the sudden silence, but Stu was trying to kiss me and I had my back to the door. Stu pulled me closer to him. "That's the surprise I told you about," he whispered thickly. "Phoned him to join the party."

A premonition cold as death struck through me. I jerked my head around and there was Greg. Standing in the doorway. Staring.

I wanted to run away. I wanted to hide. I wanted to die in those never-ending moments while his eyes bit into me. I had to watch the dreams die in them—and the softness. I saw his fists clench with shock and little white lines form around his mouth.

"Well, if it isn't the Rover Boy!" one of the girls shrilled, and there was a babble of wise-cracks and laughter.

" 'Scuse me," Stu said mockingly, "for having my arms around your Eternal Love."

Greg looked over Stu's tumbled hair and liquor-flushed face. Slowly he walked to the chair, grabbed Stu by the coat. Greg's face was grim and white, his voice filled with scorn and disgust.

"Lorraine is engaged to me." Greg's words laid silence on the room. "She promised to be my wife . . . but I've never held her in my arms like that."

*"Oh, don't!" I wanted to scream at him. "Don't let them know how terribly you've been hurt."*

"I loved Lorraine and respected her. I even thought the rest of you must be all right because you were her friends." Greg flung Stu from him with contempt, and turned to the rest of the crowd. "You bunch of parasites. You poor excuses for men and women!" His narrowed eyes raked the room.

Boys and girls making love. Cloe Baxter poised in the middle of her version of a strip tease. One of the fellows was on the floor, passed out cold.

"You drink and raise hell and make love to other men's women. You—" Greg's smile was awful.

Somebody recovered enough to yell, "Go on, Rover Boy. 'Tisn't Sunday but we can use a sermon."

"So you call me Rover Boy and you think that's funny. Lorraine told you I dedicated poems to her—so you could laugh at that, too." He was looking at me again and I couldn't stand it. I buried my flaming face in my arms.

"Why did you do it, Lorraine?" His voice was beginning to break now. "Just to make a fool of me. Just to end it by calling me to see you in another man's arms. . . ."

Suddenly as he came, he was gone, and a burst of nervous laughter followed him out into the bright sunlight.

Stu was pulling me close to him again. "Don't play the shrinking violet, Lorry. The Rover Boy couldn't have put on a better show—"

"Shut up!" I yanked away from him. "That was a low, sneaking trick, Stu."

I saw astonishment slack his face and somebody muttered, "Well, I'll be damned."

I pushed past them, saw Greg's car wasn't outside and started running down the trail. My high heels wrenched my feet and I snagged my skirt on a stump. My heart thumped with the strain but still I kept running.

IT seemed like a nightmare where I ran and ran forever, with only the empty trail winding ahead of me. Then I saw him and called. I guess I screamed his name. He turned and waited.

"Greg! Greg!" Half-sobbing, I stood before him and his lips were a tight grim line. My heart was full of the things he must know—that I hadn't deliberately let him in for that shameful scene in the cabin. That he hadn't been just a joke to me—but I couldn't say them.

I could only stand there and hurt and know I'd always hate myself for doing this to him.

"Why do you follow me? Why do you cry now?" He whipped the challenge at me. "Why don't you go on laughing? It was funny—wasn't it!"

"No! Oh, no!" Impulsively my hands went out to clasp his shoulders and I felt his muscles stiffen against me. The blackness in his eyes began to smolder.

Abruptly he crushed me to him. His lips possessed mine violently. With the liquor, and all that had happened, I went a little dizzy.

His hands were tearing at my hair, pulling at the braids until they shook loose. "I've dreamed of you this way," he breathed, "with that beautiful black hair loose about your shoulders."

His arms tightened again, hurting me. But I didn't cry out. I knew he wanted to hurt me.

"And while I dreamed of you—other men were holding you in their arms! Kissing you! Making love to you!"

My eyes flew wide, searching his.

"That's funny, too, isn't it?" His lips, so close to mine that I could almost feel the pain in them, twisted in a bitter smile. "You must have laughed about that, too. When you were letting other men make love to you. . . ."

"It isn't true! No man ever—" I tried to tell him but my words were smothered in the frenzied pressure of his lips.

Suddenly I realized what he meant to do.

I began to fight. Fight with all the fury of knowing that this mustn't happen! I'd stripped Greg of everything else. I couldn't let him forfeit his own self-respect.

What happened to me now didn't matter. But Greg did. He was half mad with shock and I had to stop him. For his own sake.

He was strong, holding me while I struggled away from him. We swayed off the trail, stumbled over a fallen tree. I screamed. His arms relaxed and I tore away from him. Then I slapped him—hard.

We faced each other, while the red marks of my fingers rose on his cheeks. When I could catch my breath, I told him, "I know you hate me now, Greg, but don't make it so you'll have to hate yourself!"

His eyes closed and his hands covered them, and I saw the muscles cord in his bare throat. When he sank down on the tree I knew he was crying.

Desperately, I tried to think of something to say—some way to wipe out just a bit of misery I'd caused. My hand went out to touch his shoulder but it stopped midway. There were footsteps on the trail. Somebody had heard my scream—was coming.

They mustn't see—this!

"Goodbye, Greg." I just whispered it, and he didn't answer, and I had to hurry away.

Around the first bend I stopped, braiding my hair with shaking fingers, smoothing my twisted blouse. When I saw Stu coming, I walked to meet him, trying to act calm.

"What's all the yelling about?" He'd sobered up a lot, and his eyes were knowing as they took in my disheveled appearance.

"I—I fell down." Taking his hand I tried to pull him back up the trail, but he turned me to him.

"Listen, Lorry"—suspicion edged his voice—"just which one of us have you been playing for a sucker?"

"Myself," I said shortly. "Take me home, Stu."

I finished out my Senior year at Teacher's College. I was there when Dad forwarded to me that issue of "*Script.*"

On the editorial page, Greg had quoted Oscar Wilde:

*"Yet each man kills the thing he loves,*
*By each let this be heard.*
*Some do it with a bitter look,*
*Some with a flaming word.*
*The coward does it with a kiss.*
*The brave man with a sword."*

That was meant for me. It was Greg's way of saying goodbye. And I awoke a hundred nights, seeing that line—*"The coward does it with a kiss."*

Through the summer, I kept on going to school. I didn't want to go home. I didn't get any kick out of running around any more and study kept me occupied.

Stu came to see me once. He had a sleek new car and he was half-drunk. While he drove around he tried to paw me and I was utterly disgusted. I just told him that I didn't want to see him any more. Having learned what real love is, I knew I could never be satisfied with a substitute.

This year, I've been teaching, in a little country school. I've studied and worked—and learned to know myself.

Today your book came, Greg. Dedicated *"To Lorraine."*

You bared your heart, and you bared our love. But in the end you said—*"Love can be mortally wounded and still live, though it feeds on nothing but new dreams and ever-lasting hope."*

That gave me courage to write my story, Greg. It is the offer of my love. My way of saying—*Forgive Me!*

THE END

# Our Kisses Led to Tragedy

*Continued from page 7*

me. He hadn't given me a whipping since I was twelve.

"No! Papa, don't—"

He didn't pay any attention.

When it was over he faced me. "Now you will obey me while you live in my house."

After he left I sobbed myself to sleep. But one feeling was stronger than my humiliation over the whipping. I hated Teresa.

She came to me next day. "Dolores, I'm sorry! I didn't know Papa would punish you."

I stared at her. "I don't want to talk to you," I said. "Just because you let Papa spoil your life you want him to spoil mine!"

After that I was even more careful. The weeks and months passed, and after a while Teresa and I hardy spoke to each other. But often I would catch her watching me, her eyes cruel and curious, as if she was trying to find out the things I was hiding from her.

When I was seventeen Papa let me go with boys, but he was stricter than other girls' fathers.

At eighteen, I finished high school. I had taken stenographic work but there were few jobs, and those went to experienced girls. Teresa said she couldn't get me in at her office, but I suspected she just didn't want me working at the same place.

Then one night Papa came home from work and instead of sitting down with the evening paper he went right out to the kitchen. I was setting the table and I could hear him talking to Mama.

"We moved the last furniture into the Mayfair Grill today," he said. "I went down to do some touching up on the finish. The manager told me his restaurant reopens next week. He is looking for a girl for cashier." Papa's voice sounded worried.

"Cashier, Angelo? Did you tell him about Dolores?"

"Yes," Papa said. "But it is working evenings until midnight—"

But before he could finish I rushed into the kitchen. "Papa," I cried. "Let me take the job."

He grabbed my arm. "Be still!" he shouted. "Can't you see I'm talking to Mama?"

"Tell me," I begged. "What did the man say?"

He loosened my arm. "The manager's a good man, Maria. I told him how we had raised Dolores. He promised me he would keep an eye on Dolores himself."

I could hardly keep still. With a job I could have some money to spend without having to tell Papa what I did with every penny.

A WEEK later I sat on the high stool at the cashier's cage in the Mayfair Grill. I looked around the large room with its tables set with gleaming tablecloths and sparkling silver.

It was near midnight when a blond young man stopped at my desk. He handed me a check for a cup of coffee. He watched me, his blue eyes shining. As I handed him his change, he said, "You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said. I was conscious that the dark dress I wore with its white organdie collar was becoming.

He smiled. "You'll make the grade."

A moment after he left, Laura, the head-waitress, came up. "You're doing all right," she said. "If I weren't married I could go for him the same as all the rest of the girls."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"That's Carl Coleman. He owns the cab company with the stand out front."

The young man stuck his head back in the door. "I just wanted to tell you I'm taking you home tonight," he said. He went out before I could answer.

When the last customer was gone Mr. Patri came to check the money.

After we were through I said, "The young man who owns the cab stand out in front asked to take me home. What shall I do?"

"Do you want to go with him?" Mr. Patri's eyes were twinkling.

"Yes sir," I said. I could feel my face flushing under his amused glance.

"He's a nice fellow. Your father is coming in tomorrow morning to see about the upholstery. I'll tell him about young Coleman then. Run along now."

I found Carl waiting for me at the side entrance. He looked even taller in the dark driver's cap he had on. He jumped out of a cab. "I'm relieving one of my men tonight. You can sit up here with me."

I didn't know what to talk about as we rode along. A man like Carl Coleman, used to night life and experienced girls, wouldn't be interested in anything I could say.

He pulled up in front of the house, I looked at him. "Thanks for the ride," I said.

He caught my hand, drawing me toward him. My heart began to beat fast. I knew he was going to kiss me, and I wanted him to. But I pulled my hand away. I couldn't let him kiss me the first time I went with him.

"Good night," I said.

He drew me into his arms. "You're a sweet kid, Dolores," he whispered. Then he kissed my lips lightly and gave me a little push. "You better get going now. I'll see you tomorrow night."

Two days later Mama said, "You must bring your young man home to dinner Sunday. Papa told me to tell you."

I dreaded having Papa meet Carl. What if Teresa tried to make trouble? But I had to take the chance.

When Carl came the next Sunday Papa and Mama liked him. Even Teresa could not find fault with him.

Teresa was twenty-four now. She didn't go out with boys at all and seemed satisfied with her work at the office.

"Teresa is a coward," I told myself. "She thinks more of peace than she does of happiness with the man she loves." I despised her. How could she have let Tony go?

In two weeks Carl and I were engaged. We wanted to be married right away, but Carl had to pay back what his father had loaned him to start the cab company. His father was running for re-election as sheriff in his city and needed every penny to advance his campaign.

Our engagement was all right with Papa and Mama. Carl came to dinner with us often, usually on Sunday, because I had the night off, and then we'd go dancing in the evening.

Carl and I used to play a little game. We counted up the weeks since we had met and celebrated each one with something special.

He would ask me what I wanted to do the week ahead. It was beautiful fall weather last October, and I suggested a picnic supper to celebrate the sixth week after we had met. We started out after sundown for a picnic grove outside the city.

We parked the cab and crossed a footbridge to a little island. Carl spread an auto-robe on the soft grass.

I stretched out on it, watching the moonlight through the tree tops. Carl dropped down beside me, gathering me up into his arms.

"You're so sweet, Dolores," he whispered. My arms went around his neck as I gave him back his kiss. I had never been so happy. I wanted this kiss to last forever, but when his arms tightened I grew frightened.

"It's all right, darling," he said, "don't be afraid." But I pushed my hands against his chest.

"No, Carl, no."

His mouth was close to mine, "If you really loved me, you couldn't refuse," he murmured. And then his lips came down again, making my blood pound and draining me of all reason, sweeping me away on this madness of love that I could not refuse. . . .

After a while I found myself clinging to Carl, sobbing against his shoulder. His arms around me were gentle and protective now.

"Carl," I said, scarcely above a whisper, "Carl, we must get married right away."

He kissed me tenderly. "We are married, darling. We don't need a ceremony to make you my wife. We'll have it, of course, but nothing could make you more completely mine than you are now."

The sweetness of our love rushed over me. I had never dreamed I could love anyone as I did Carl.

BUT LATER, in my room, I leaned against the door, sobs shaking me. This was my wedding night, I thought wildly. This was the beginning of my life with Carl. Why had I done it? Why had I let it happen this way?

I threw myself across the bed. This wasn't the way it should be. Stolen love that made me feel ashamed. Tomorrow I would tell Carl we had to get married at once.

I sneaked out of the house next day and spent the afternoon downtown. I didn't want to see Papa and Mama before Carl and I made everything right. I didn't want to face Teresa's curious eyes.

That evening, when I had my five minute relief at ten-thirty, I slipped out to Carl's cab stand. He caught me in his arms. "I love you, Dolores."

I drew away. "We've got to be married, Carl. I can go on working."

"In six months," he said. "When I've paid out the last payment on the cabs."

"No—now, tonight."

"No, Dolores. My wife isn't going to work. Don't you trust me, darling?"

"But—" I began.
"Run back in," Carl said. "You leave the worrying to me, Dolores."
The weeks that followed were torment. Carl was sweet, dearer than he had ever been, but I couldn't forget for one instant that what I was doing was wrong. I felt as if everyone could read in my face what had happened. The days dragged past, it seemed as if the six months would never end.
It was almost two months after that night on the island that I got up one noon and the room seemed to be spinning around me. I caught at the post of the bed. I stood there, fighting faintness. Carl and I would have to be married today, even if we had to live on nothing at all. There was going to be a baby to think of now....
I dressed and hurried down to the office of his cab company.
Carl was at the desk. "What's the matter, Dolores? You're so pale."
"Take me out in a cab," I said. "I've got to see you alone." My voice almost broke but I held it steady.
He stopped the cab on the edge of a park and turned to me, his arms went around me. "Tell me, dear."
"Carl, I'm going to have a baby!"
His face whitened. "Are you sure, Dolores?"
"Yes."
"We'll have to get married right away," he said. "Don't look like that. It's going to be all right."
"But what would we live on?"
"I'll borrow three hundred dollars from Dad."
"Carl, you won't tell him—" My heart began to pound. What would Carl's father think of me?
"Of course not. If he refuses I know one other place to get the cash." His voice was tight and his face was very pale. "It's only forty miles home. I'll run up there tonight and talk to Dad. I'll be back tomorrow."
"I hate you having to ask him when he refused you before," I said. "Carl, we could get married out of town. I could live at home until you can take care of me."
"They'd wonder why we kept quiet about it. No, darling, we're through hiding our love. We're coming out into the open with it. No one is ever going to say a word against you or our baby."
I don't know how I got through my work that night. One minute I would be sure Carl's father would lend him the money, the next I would be just as sure he would refuse.
The next two days were agony. At home I listened for the telephone. At the Mayfair I watched the cab stand. But there was no word from Carl. I asked one of the cab drivers about him.
"He's still gone, Dolores."
Why didn't I hear from Carl? Had his father refused him the money? Had Carl gone to the other person he had mentioned to get it?
That night when I went to the powder room at ten-thirty Laura, the head waitress slipped in.



**Because of my sin, I brought ruin to all of us.**

She came to me. "I've got bad news for you, honey. Carl's in a jam."
My throat felt tight and dry. "What's happened?" I asked.
"Mr. Patri heard on the radio in the office that Carl's being held by the police. He's accused of taking evidence that was locked in his father's desk at home. He sold it to Jake Maroldi who has those gambling places out in the county."
I stared at her. "You can't say that about Carl. He didn't do it. Somebody wants to make trouble for him." But somehow, I knew that wasn't true. Carl had stolen that evidence so he could marry me!
Laura put her arm around me. "You poor kid. Carl has confessed. The police are holding him. Now you fix your face and trot home. Mr. Patri said it was okay with him. Do you want me to go with you?"
"No," I said. I wanted to be by myself.
I rode on the bus for hours. Long after midnight I let myself into the house. I sat on my bed in the darkness, dry sobs shaking me. I didn't dare let Papa or Teresa find out. There was no one I could turn to.
The door opened and Teresa said softly. "Are you awake, Dolores?"
I cleared my throat before I answered. Teresa must not know I was crying. "Yes," I said. "What do you want?"
She snapped on the light. She stood staring at me. "You're crying. What's the matter?"
Suddenly it was all too much. I buried my face in the pillow and gave way to the tears I had fought so long.
Teresa knelt beside me and put her arm around me. "Tell me," she whispered.
I sat up. "You'll tell Papa," I said.
"No."
"You hate me. You told on me before." My voice rose.
"Be quiet, they'll hear you." She went and closed the door and snapped off the light. "I won't say a word to Papa."

I sobbed out the whole story. Teresa did not speak. I knew she despised me. She had given up Tony because of Papa. She would never understand how I could have given myself to Carl.

At last she said, "I'll help you all I can, Dolores. Try to get some sleep."

Next day while I was dressing there was a knock at my door and Teresa walked in. "I came home on my lunch hour," she said. She held out a newspaper. I stared at the headline.

Carl had been sentenced to a year in the penitentiary. My eyes flew along the lines. He had tried to get money from his father. They had a big row. Several months ago Jake Maroldi had asked Carl to get that evidence. Carl had refused and told his father. That's why the papers were at Mr. Coleman's home instead of in his office.

He had done it for me. I had to see Carl, but I didn't dare go to him because of Papa.

"When you go downstairs pick up the paper and start reading," Teresa said. "Act as if you don't know about Carl. When you find the item you can go to pieces. Mama will think it is because you love Carl and he went bad. You mustn't let Papa or Mama suspect why he wanted the money."

I nodded numbly.

Teresa took the paper. "I went to the boss. He offered last week to send me to the main office in Harborville and I refused because I didn't want to leave home. I'm going to tell him I changed my mind. And when I go, you'll go with me."

"Papa won't let me," I whispered.

"I'll tell him you're humiliated about Carl and want to get away for a while. We will stay until your baby is born. We won't plan beyond that."

"No," I said, hardly above a whisper. "I won't do it." Living with Teresa like that would be too awful. "I have some money. I'll go to a doctor. That will be best for all of us. For Carl and for me; even for the baby."

The thought of destroying my baby made me tremble.

Teresa grabbed my shoulder. "You'll do as I say. If you don't, I'll tell Papa the whole story."

A WEEK later Carl's lawyer came as I was leaving the grill one night. "I have a message from Carl," he said.

My heart pounded. "Tell me! What is it?" I begged.

"He says that you are not to write, or come to see him."

I stared at the stern-faced man. "Why?"

"You should know." His voice was cold. "And now, if you'll excuse me." He walked away.

Why had Carl sent that message? Did it mean that he was through with me? Did he blame me for what had happened? Or was he trying to protect me? Over and over I asked myself those questions.

Two months later Teresa and I left Harborville. Papa had never suspected what was wrong.

"You're a brave girl, Dolores," he said, when he kissed me goodbye. "He wasn't good enough for you."

Teresa and I found a small apartment and got settled. I hated accepting everything from Teresa because I knew why she was doing it. It made her feel noble and superior. Love had passed her by when she put Tony out of her life. She hated me because Carl had loved me. Now Carl was in prison in disgrace and I was facing my ordeal alone. And Teresa was glad. It proved that she had done the right thing after all.

One noon she came home to dinner and found me crying. I told her then, for the first time, of the message Carl had sent. "What do you think he meant?" I asked her.

She stared at me. "If I were you I wouldn't count on ever seeing him again," she said.

I caught my breath. How could Teresa be so cruel? When she went back to her office I was like a crazy person.

I couldn't go on like this any longer. Teresa would hate my baby, too. She would take out her hatred of me on my child. That was why she was doing all this for me. She would wait, maybe for years, then she would tell the child and be revenged for what life had done to her.

But I wouldn't let her. It was hours until Teresa would come home. I hurried out of the apartment and caught a street car. I found a pawnshop and bought a gun and got bullets at a sporting goods store.

Streetcars, traffic, my own cumbersome body, all fought against the thing I was going to do. I was dazed.

At the apartment I hung my coat carefully in the closet and put my hat on the shelf above. I turned to the mirror of the dresser. My face seemed strange, dark eyes stared at me hopelessly. She is right . . . so right, I told myself, staring at the strange girl in the mirror. I began forcing bullets into the cylinder of the revolver.

There was a scream and I turned, hiding the gun behind me.

"Dolores! Are you crazy?" Teresa ran across the room and took the gun from my shaking hand.

I slid to the floor, covering my face with my hands and crying helplessly. I had forgotten it was Saturday and Teresa would be home early. "You've always hated me. You're going to make me go on suffering, aren't you?" I sobbed.

"You'll see it through," she said coldly, through white lips.

The weeks dragged on. Teresa and I wrote home regularly, careful not to let anything slip that would give my secret away.

And then came that evening that I will never forget. I had just come in from a walk. Teresa was reading in the tiny living room. There was a knock at the door.

Teresa went and opened it. I stood staring for a long, terrible second, then screamed in terror.

Papa stood in the doorway!

He came in and Teresa shut the door behind him. He walked toward me, staring at me, his face white, the pupils of his eyes dwindled to pinpoints.

I stood up, backing away from him. "So! This is the reason Teresa took you away!"

Teresa rushed to him, clutching his arms. "Papa! Don't touch her!"

He pushed Teresa. She fell to the floor. He came on. "You have disgraced me," he said. He raised his fist. I shrank back, dreading the blow. But before he could hit me there was a blinding flash, then a sharp report, and Papa swayed, sank to one knee, clutching convulsively at my coat. Then he crashed to the floor and lay still. Too still.

"I told him not to touch you." Teresa's voice was toneless. Her eyes

were fixed on Papa. "I told him, didn't I?"

She stared at the gun in her hand, the gun she had taken from me that day and locked in the desk, where she had fallen when Papa pushed her.

Her hand opened and the gun fell to the floor. She bent over Papa.

"He's dead," she said.

I felt myself falling. Then there was nothing but blackness.

WHEN I woke a nurse was sitting in a chair by the bed. "How do you feel?" she asked.

I looked toward the window. The sun was shining in. Suddenly the events of last night came back to me. "Where's Teresa?" I asked. I started to sit up. The nurse put her hands on my shoulders, forcing me back. "You lost your baby. You must be quiet."

I stared at her. Papa was dead. The baby was dead. My baby . . . Carl's baby. Oh, Lord, why wasn't I dead, too?

The nurse was watching me. "You've got to tell me," I said. "Where is my sister?"

"The doctor said I was to tell you if you insisted. Your sister is under arrest for the murder of your father."

Mama came next day. She did not say a word, just bent over me and took me in her arms, holding me close while she sobbed.

It was two weeks before I saw Teresa. They took me to her jail cell and left me with her. She looked old and haggard and I noticed for the first time, streaks of gray in her black hair. I clung to her. "It's my fault," I choked. "I put you here."

She kissed me. "You must not blame yourself, Dolores. I put myself here. I started on the road here years ago."

"What do you mean, Teresa?"

"Didn't you ever wonder why I gave Tony up? Didn't you think it strange that I never defied Papa?"

"Yes," I answered. "I thought it was because you were afraid of him."

"No. If Tony had loved me I would never have let him go. He didn't love me, Dolores. I only thought he did. He said if I loved him I would not refuse him, and I listened. I thought he meant to marry me. Then, when I found I was going to have a baby. . . ."

"You were going to have a baby!"

"Yes. And Tony didn't want me any more. I let them kill my baby, Dolores. That is the thing I can never forget. That is why I wouldn't let you do that! That's why I shot Papa when he was going to beat you. I was a murderess long before I killed Papa."

She was crying. I held her close.

"I went to a woman the night before I left for the camp. Remember how white and weak I was when I got back?"

"I thought you were grieving for Tony."

"That's what I wanted everyone to think."

"And I though you were jealous of me," I sobbed.

"I wanted to keep all that from happening to you, Dolores. I knew you didn't understand, but I couldn't help that."

Teresa was acquitted after the jury heard my testimony. But her life is ruined. She decided to stay on in Harborville. She found another job and is getting along all right, but there is no trace of the lovely girl she used to be.

Today a letter came for me. It was forwarded from the Mayfair Grill. It is from Carl. I have read it over a hundred times. He will be released from the Penitentiary soon. I am going to meet him in a little cafe in the town outside the prison. We are going to be married and go away where no one knows us.

I was weak. I was mad to let love carry me along when I should have been strong for both of us. But maybe some day I will have paid enough for what I did and we will find true happiness.

THE END

## Hints on Hand Care




**Most people don't wash hands properly. Wet hands first, then apply soap and work into a good lather. Rinse and dry well.**

**To prevent brittle nails, smooth a little glycerine over your nails when your hands feel dry from being too much in water.**

# Deceitful Wife

*Continued from page 11*

ma'am?" he asked, in a soft drawl. I went into his arms.

We danced in the hall. I was only dimly aware that he didn't dance very well. I was too busy looking at his eyes and listening to his voice. He said his name was Ty Lovett and he came from Montala, Florida.

"Like as not you never heard of it," he said.

"Never did," I admitted.

"It's no more'n a freight stop. What's your name?"

"Jewel."

"Honest?" His eyes were shining. "It suits you. Jewel! I like that."

Half the time we couldn't hear the music but Ty kept up that shuffling sort of dance, while his touch was as light as though he thought I'd break.

"You're awful nice to dance with me," he said when the noise subsided for a moment. "My friend, Sim Wiggins, who came with me, is a fine dancer."

"I'd rather dance with you, unless you want to change."

"No, ma'am," he said emphatically. We were all the way at the back of the hall, trying to escape the noise. We could hear each other. Ty said: "I know I don't dance well. When I was a kid, I had my foot caught in a buzz saw. It broke it up pretty bad and while I'm not lame, I don't dance well."

He gave a deep sigh. "That's why I'm working here in the shipyards. My four brothers are in the Navy. I'd be there if it weren't for my foot."

"I've got a brother in the Army," I said, quick and proud. Ty smiled, then frowned quickly, every thought reflected in his face. He started to speak but the hot throbbing rhythm seemed to spill from the crowded living room.

Ty held me tighter, his face flushed, his eyes wary. Then I saw his friend, Sim Wiggins, with a brown-haired girl. He called out something I didn't hear and he and the girl went upstairs. Another couple followed them.

Then I saw Lorna and heard the angry voices. She was with two men. There was an oath and an upswung fist. In an instant it was a riot of screams, curses and flailing blows. Swearing loudly, Daisy rushed down the stairs. The lights went out.

The night was alive with noise. Screams and shouts cut through with the unmistakable shrill of a police whistle. I saw a cop coming down the hall. Ty grabbed me and before I knew what had happened opened a window in the back hall and lifted me through. There was a gruff voice and a hand on Ty's shoulder, but he dropped me to the ground, twisted away from the policeman and slipped out of the window.

Ty's hand locked on my wrist as we raced down a dark alley, my net skirt billowing out in the cold March wind. At the corner, he flattened himself against the high board fence, peered around cautiously. Then holding me in front of him, literally pushed me across the sidewalk to a small parked car. He wrapped an old robe around me and I huddled in it, sobbing and shivering as he stepped on the gas. The scream of police sirens filled the night as Ty drove across town.

WE stopped in a quiet street. It was lined with signs of tourist homes and furnished rooms. Ty cut the motor and lit a cigarette with shaking hands. His voice too was unsteady as he asked what I wanted to do.

"What can I do?" I faltered. "I haven't any money and no clothes, only what I have on."

"I was afraid of that," he said, dragging on the cigarette. "That's why I came here, to my place. You can stay here and I'll go over to Sim's."

I nodded unhappily. What choice had I? I knew now what kind of place Lorna worked, and how "nice" I was supposed to be to the boys. I knew what Ty must think and nothing could change it. To tell him my sister was there, would only make it worse.

Without a word, I got out of the car and crossed the sidewalk with him. His room, luckily, was on the first floor, a plain clean room with an iron bed and furniture that didn't match. Ty locked the door before he put on the light.

"I have to get a sweater," he explained. "I left my overcoat—back there."

I stood in the middle of the floor, clutching the blanket. He said, "Make yourself at home. I'm going, right away."

I let go of the blanket. "I can't thank you enough," I stammered. "I can't really. You've been so good."

Looking down at me, the deep frown faded and that slow smile lifted the corners of his wide mouth.

"You're awful cute," he said gently, as his warm hands closed on my bare arms and he kissed me.

His mouth on mine was warm and sweet and suddenly comforting. Then his big arms closed around me, held me close. I could feel the warmth of him, the pounding of his great heart. All fear ran out of me, all the cold terror of that night and all the nights before, all the loneliness and tears and heartache. This was home. This was heaven.

Hungrily I clung to him, my lips answering his, begging for reassurance I'd never found before. I wasn't thinking of right and wrong. I wasn't thinking!

Then suddenly fear rushed over me. I tried to cry out, but his lips stifled my very breath. I tried to struggle free but his strength was overwhelming.

Later, the hard sobs that had crowded my throat loosened, racked my body. Ty reached out and put his hand on my shoulder. I shrank from him. Not that I hated him—but because I was sure he hated me.

He didn't touch me again. I heard him moving slowly in the darkness. My heart seemed to stop entirely. Was he leaving—like those other men? Confirming his hate—his contempt? I couldn't bear him to stay or to go.

Unexpectedly Ty switched on the light. I quickly turned my face from him. He came and sat beside me, gently put his hand around my shoulder, spoke my name.

"I have no business expecting you even to listen to me, after this," he began slowly. "Bringing you here, as



**"But I killed him, I killed him!" Ty kept saying in a voice that sounded hollow.**

though I were going to take care of you—and I meant to. I did, Jewel, so help me."

"I came here," I said softly. "That's enough to put the blame on me."

"No, it isn't Jewel," he denied fiercely. "Don't you suppose I know there's never been anyone else?"

His voice grew tense, lower. "From the start I was surprised meeting you in that place where Sim said any girl could be had for—for the evening. Then it seemed like a regular party and I almost forgot for a while . . . then I did forget."

"Maybe we both just got mixed up," I whispered.

"That's right, everything's mixed up: I don't belong here. I don't belong in cities or in the steel plant. I hate the noise and the smell and the crowds." Suddenly he leaned closer to me. I wasn't afraid now.

"Jewel, I'm going home—back to Florida. Mom's been writing me to come. She says there's plenty of defense work raising tomatoes, oranges and stuff. It's the place I know, the work I like. She says there's a job, too. Being guard at Lake Fernando, on the road to the government testing station. A house and farm land goes with it. Kind of lonely out there," he smiled with happy remembering, "but, gee, it's nice."

I felt the tears well up in my throat, burn my lids. I tried to keep my voice steady when I said, "You're right, Ty. You ought to go back where you have people and you live right. If you stay here, you might get in trouble. I'm used to it."

I had to shut my eyes quick against the tears. His hand closed over mine, tight and steady.

"Jewel," he said softly, "you don't understand. I want you to go with me. I want to marry you and take you home."

MR. and Mrs. Tyson Lovett! Ty wrote that in the hotel registry at Edenton, North Carolina, and again in Charleston, South Carolina, and at Jacksonville. I looked each time to be sure. A hundred times I opened the little white book and read the inscription there: *"Tyson Lovett and Jewel Anson . . . united in holy matrimony . . ."*

It was holy. It was precious. It was sacred. I would keep it that way, always. I'd make up to Ty for everything that had been—that might have been—and especially for the deceit and the lies I'd told.

There had to be lies. I couldn't tell him the truth about Martha and Katie and Nick and—worst of all—Lorna. He wouldn't understand, I told myself, but, in truth, I was afraid he'd understand too well. If he did, he wouldn't marry a girl from a family like mine.

So I lied. I made it quick and simple . . . giving it the lie from what I omitted rather than from what I told: I hated my stepmother. It was unbearable at home after my brother joined the army. A girl friend said she could get me a job in Wilmington. I came that morning, met Ty that first evening.

Ty made it easier by asking no questions. He gave me money for clothes, bought a few things for me himself because I couldn't go shopping in an evening dress. By noon I had a cheap little wardrobe assembled. At five o'clock we were married in Maryland. I wrote a brief note to Lorna that I was safe and not coming back. Ty wired his folks and we started for the South on a heavenly honeymoon.

With every mile we left Winter further behind. In South Carolina the trees were in bud, Georgia brought us to flowering shrubs; in Florida, it was summer.

I was terrified of meeting Ty's folks, especially when I saw their lovely house, a big white bungalow surrounded by a green lawn and masses of flowers, and, behind it, rows and rows of orange trees!

His mother came hurrying out to meet us. She looked like Ty, and when she scooped me into her arms, her dress smelled sweet and clean, of sun-dried, freshly-ironed cotton.

"My first daughter," she said and kissed me.

Then Ty's father came, a tall, lean tanned man. He kissed me, too, and teased me, calling me a Yankee. That evening Ma and Pa, as I called them from the first, said there was a cover dish supper at the church, so we'd all go.

I didn't tell them I'd never been to any church in all my life. Everybody was so nice to me, and everybody looked so nice. I don't mean dressed up. It was the look in their faces, quiet and kind and dignified and not afraid.

Next morning, Ty went out to help his father and I stayed home with Ma. I told her my mother died when I was a baby and my stepmother never bothered to teach me anything—as if Martha knew anything!

"What housework I do, I figured out for myself, but I wish you'd teach me your way, so I can please Ty."

She was crossing the big shining kitchen, a pan from the oven in her hand. Slowly she put the pan down. There were tears on her cheeks. Her voice was low when she spoke.

"Bless you, dear, you said what every mother of a good son prays to hear—that you want to make my boy happy."

Those next two weeks were so wonderful, I still like to shut my eyes and dream about them. They seem

more like a dream anyway—the beauty of the place, the sunshine, the kindness of everybody. Then there were the presents. Ty had flocks of aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. They all came to see us and brought us things—from homemade preserves to furniture.

Then Ty got the job at the lake and Pa's farm truck was loaded to the top with all our things. I rode with him when we drove down. He said, "I only hope you won't get lonely, used to a city like you are."

I laughed right out. Imagine—lonely in heaven! And Lake Ferando was another heaven. Blue water reflected blue sky and our own bungalow, our own boat landing, our own garden. Pines grew to the water's edge and through them ran the white road to the government munitions' testing station, hidden miles off down the road. It was part of my job and Ty's to stop any cars, warn them they'd be turned back without a government pass.

I told Ma the truth when I said I'd been taught nothing about housework but I always liked it. It came natural to me like music comes to some people. Now I could do the things I'd always wanted to do, such as keep the kitchen clean, try out different recipes and plant a flower garden.

THE months rolled by, and Ty and I were so happy, so unbelievably happy each hour of the day. I didn't know which was best, waking in the morning to find him beside me, the fun of sharing each meal, doing for him when he was out working, the joy of having him come home, or the last sweet hour in his arms.

Each week-end was a separate joy, of having company or being entertained. Then two of Ty's brothers came home—big handsome boys in their Navy uniforms. Sailors on shore leave! But how different from the sailors I'd seen along the docks. Then I remembered meeting Ty—maybe all men were like that away from home, away from what they knew was right.

All these thoughts I kept to myself and only spoke of Pete, to whom I wrote regularly, but I never let Ty read his letters. They didn't sound good, full of grumbling about officers and drill. I wondered if soldiers in any other army could write like that and not get shot.

When he complained about the food, I got mad. It couldn't be worse than the stuff Martha used to throw on the table. I sat down and wrote him so, too, but that was the letter he didn't get.

It was late in September—the day after I mailed that letter—and I was sitting on the porch practicing my knitting. Ty was out back building an incubator. His hammer was the only sound in the stillness until a car came purring down the road.

I went down the path to signal it when it slid to a stop before me. Words lumped in my throat. Getting out of the car was Sim Wiggins, Ty's friend from that awful night at Daisy's.

For a second he looked almost as surprised as I. Then his bright eyes ran over me in such a way I flushed, having forgotten men can look like that.

"I wouldn't have known you," he said slowly. "You sure picked up."

I had changed; my skin was golden brown, sparkling with my new happiness. But I didn't want to hear it from him. Swaggering, little and cocky, he walked beside me up the path, smiling in a wise, eager way that brought back a thousand unwelcome memories.

At that moment, Ty came around the house, his gun through the crook of his arm. At sight of Sim, he dropped the gun, came forward quickly.

"I didn't hear a sound, thought it might be trouble," he laughed. "Never can tell in these times. When did you get in, fellow? How long you staying?"

"Not long!" Sim made a gesture of disgust. "I'm off this country. How do you stand being buried down here?"

"Buried? This is real living."

Ty laughed as he said that but his voice was strained, and there were little bunches of muscles along his jaw. It was plain he wasn't at ease, but Sim swelled like a frog.

"There's a strike on at the plant," he explained. "I figured it would take them ten days to get fixed up so I jumped in the buggy and drove down. How do you like it?"

Ty said it was a right nice car but expensive looking. Sim shrugged. "Why not? I pulled down eighty bucks last week. Bet that's more'n you made."

"More than I'll make this month in cash money," Ty admitted. "But when you count rent free and the living off the land, it's different."

"It sure is different—it's a fortune," I said quickly, then remembering some of my new learned lessons, I added, "You'll have dinner with us, won't you?"

Dinner is at midday even in summer when the crops are in. I was sorry when Sim accepted but glad for an excuse to escape to the kitchen. My hands were shaking as I went about my work and my mind kept ticking: "He won't stay long. He's Ty's friend. He won't talk."

But that evening did I imagine Ty seemed strained? Did I imagine later there was a frantic ardor in his love making, or was it because a thousand new hungry fires—fed on fear—burned in my own blood?

Whether it was one or both of us, something had changed . . . gone out of our days. I wondered if Ty had said anything to Sim about meeting me, or marrying me. Never once had we mentioned it between us. I had believed all that past so buried, so forgotten.

Now it was alive again. What if

**For Girls Only**

If you want to be populor with the boys:

Leorn to "break the ice"—stort conversotions eosily with men.

Leorn to listen well. Ask him questions; show him you're interested.

Don't moke o man feel inferior by discussing subjects obove his heod.

Leorn to receive compliments grocefully.

Ty found out about Lorna? Why hadn't I told him the full truth then? If I told him now, he'd doubt it was the whole truth come so late.

Every time we met Sim that week, there was his teasing, too wise smile. The way he'd touch me whenever he had a chance and the way he danced with me Saturday night at a party, holding me too tight.

"I could go for you," he whispered.

"You'd have a trip for nothing," I retorted, pulling away from him.

"Don't be too sure," he whispered, as the music stopped. But looking at Ty, towering over the others, I *was* sure.

On Monday, Ty went off for the day to help his father do some planting. I stayed home. In mid-morning I was hanging clothes on the line, happier than I'd been for a week. This was the day that Sim would leave and then everything would be all right again.

I heard a truck approaching and went to the road, clothes pins in hand. When I saw it was the regular food supply truck on the way to the testing station, I turned back, stopped. The truck didn't slow down, but a man in a uniform looked furtively out of the back and jumped off. I went rigid, icy, there in the hot sun. The man was Pete.

"Jewel!" he cried, and ran, stumbling like a child. "Oh, God, I never thought I'd get here."

**FOR MEN ONLY**

If you want to be popular with the girls:

Ask her where *she* wants to go when you're on a date.

Don't make her struggle for her honor on the way home.

Learn to pay compliments.

Don't flirt with another girl . . . or even notice the knock-out who walks into the room.

He was ghastly pale and shaking as he held me to him, kissed my cheek. My greeting was sharp, fierce. "What are you doing here?"

"I ran away." His fingers tightened on my arm. "You've got to help me, Sis, you've got to. I've deserted."

My stomach turned over, upside down. "Deserted!" I echoed.

"I had to. I couldn't take it. Always somebody telling you what to do. They picked on me."

Another truck rolled by. I waved mechanically to the boys and Pete shivered. "Come away from the front of the house," I said, and led him to the kitchen.

SILENTLY I made coffee, sandwiches, listened to his almost hysterical babble. I didn't say five words until he ate but but my thoughts were hot, searing, terrible. When I spoke, each word was measured, knowing how they were going to sound to him.

"Pete, I can't hide you. Ty wouldn't let me and I—I don't want to."

My brother stared at me. "You mean you'd turn me in? Why, you're the only one I have to go to."

"Yes, I'll turn you in," I was crying wildly. "Don't you see what you've done? You're a failure—a weakling and a coward. If you're not gone by sundown, I'll call the government station."

Pete rose slowly, his frightened eyes wide, terrible, accusing. I rushed on before he could speak: "I'll give you food and get you some money. You go away now, down the lake shore, and come back right at sunset. I'll have the stuff for you. But you've got to be gone—far away—before Ty comes."

I was pushing him toward the door as I talked. Angrily he turned on me. "I'd die before I'd take anything from you now. You're like all the rest, turn against me."

I hurried him out of the door, knowing too bitterly that he would take what I had to give and no questions asked. I shut and latched the screen door, leaned against it and through a cloud of tears watched him run across the yard to the woods by the lake. This was my brother!

My sob jolted into a scream when I heard my name spoken low. I whirled and faced Sim, standing in the door from the living room. His face was flushed, his eyes drink hazy but that smile wise and sure.

"What you need is comfort," he said thickly. He tried to put his arms around me, but I broke away, shoved the table between us. "You get out of here, Sim Wiggins. You been drinking."

"Party last night. I'm going north today. Celebrating, see?"

"You can't celebrate here," I said, bluffing as my heart thudded. How much had he heard?

"I'm not so sure," he replied, sitting on the table and lighting a cigarette. "Your brother seems to be in a bad spot. Save your act! I saw him, heard him—you were too busy to notice my nice quiet car. So you're going to give him money and food, and get him out before Ty comes?"

The fight ran out of me like spilled milk. I steadied myself on the table as Sim went on in that teasing, oily voice: "I don't know which Ty would like best to hear—that your brother's a deserter or—" he leaned toward me, still smiling— "that your sister's in jail on a morals charge."

"My sister?" I screamed.

"Sure. You left town before the big scandal broke. Your sister is Lorna Anson. Her picture was in the paper. The police really cleaned out that house—made an example of the racket they were running—the same house where Ty got you. His mother would like to see that record."

I was beyond denial or bluffing now. "You couldn't do that to—to Ma! I thought you were Ty's friend."

"Friend?" Sim sneered. "Those Lovetts think they're pretty smart. It sure would tickle me to have something on Ty—like a little love from his wife."

He was around the table, pulling me into his arms. With all my strength, I slapped and scratched and kicked. A car screeching to a stop, a rap on the front door, startled Sim and I jerked away from him. I ran through the living room, straightening my hair and my dress, faced a towering Army Sergeant.

"Jewel Anson Lovett?" he demanded, and waited for me to open the door. His words cracked over my head like bullets. My brother, Peter

Anson, a deserter . . . they'd found me through an unclaimed letter addressed to him.

"I haven't seen him," I lied through rigid lips. The soldier looked doubtful.

"All the roads are watched," he warned. "We'll be back later. If you hear, it is your duty—"

Duty . . . duty to Ty—to my country . . . to Pete. Duty . . . a strange word we'd never heard in our house. I sank down on the wicker settee, too exhausted to stand. Sim came from the kitchen, his hand shaking as he held a cigarette.

"I've got a proposition," he said. "I'll keep my trap shut in the future about Lorna and I'll take your brother off your hands now—bring clothes back later—take him with me tonight . . ."

Hope flickered, and flared. "You'd do this, Sim?" I began, and then saw that smile as he leaned toward me.

"Sure . . . for an hour with you."

For a long minute I sat there, not moving. My eyes were fixed on Sim but I was thinking of Ty and our love and all the happiness we'd had. This was my payment—betrayal and deceit and lies. There would always be lies. I should have known such happiness was not for me. I got up slowly, and Sim's arms closed around me. I pushed him away, not hard but he knew I meant it.

"You've got all the cards, so you win—but not now. Come back at four. Pete will be ready and I'll go with you."

"You'll go?" Sim blinked.

"That's the only way. A girl like me doesn't belong down here. You can drop me anywhere—Charleston, Savannah—it doesn't matter once you're—paid."

Sim's face was pasty, his lips worked uncertainly. "A little fun is one thing—but taking you away. . . ."

"That's something else," I finished with a laugh that rang strange in my ears. "Bolder than just taking a man's wife behind his back. But I'm not cheating on Ty that way. I'm going all the way. You want me—you win. Bring the clothes for Pete and we'll be ready."

Sim, cold sober as a man with a bad shock, left without another word. I went about straightening up the house I'd loved, for such a little while. It was two o'clock. In two hours we'd be gone.

I PUT on a big straw hat, went out to find Pete. About a quarter mile down the lake shore, he spotted me, came out of the brush. I told him about the soldiers looking for him and that a friend was bringing clothes. I'd ride with him as far as Charleston, perhaps.

"I knew you wouldn't let me down, Sis," Pete murmured with a gratitude that sickened me.

I went back to the house quickly, took down the wash and ironed Ty's khaki work shirts. Funny little act of love, little act of contrition for the terrible hurt I was about to bring.

At three-thirty everything was in order, my bag packed. I couldn't bring myself to write him a letter. What could I say? Tell him the truth—that I was going away with Sim—to destroy myself rather than destroy him and all he stood for in this community? He wouldn't believe me.

Then suddenly I heard the car in the yard—Ty's car bumping over the worn road to the car shelter. It wasn't . . . it couldn't be . . . he had no right to come now. I heard the motor cut, the slam of the door as I ran through the house.

As I reached the back porch, I saw Ty, walking away from the car toward the new incubator, the great breadth of his shoulders in his work-stained khaki shirt, his gun on his arm. Then I saw a tan-clad man streak across the field at the far edge of the out-buildings. It was Pete.

With a cry, I fled over the hot sun-baked yard, but Ty was already running toward the out-buildings. He shouted and on the echo of his voice, a gun barked. Ty dropped and I screamed. Gun shots crossed. I ran low but kept on going. I had no thought of death or danger for myself—only to reach Ty.

I screamed his name as I ran. Then I saw him, rising slowly as if stunned. I raced into the cow shed, stumbled and stopped. Ty was kneeling, his rifle in his hand. At his feet lay the rumpled figure in the uniform.

I dropped to my knees and clutched the limp body to me. Tears streamed down my face. "You've killed him, Ty!" I cried. "Oh, God, you've killed him!"

I don't know how long I held Pete in my arms there, but when I finally steadied myself, rose to my feet, Ty had left the shed. I stumbled outside into a yard filled with people—truck drivers, soldiers, and suddenly in their midst I saw Sim. My eyes searched frantically for Ty . . . found him with one of the soldiers.

"This man shot at me," he was explaining to the officer. "He had an army revolver."

"He's the deserter we're looking for," the officer said. "You're wearing khaki and carrying a rifle—he must have thought you were a soldier, come to take him."

Suddenly I found my voice. "I'm sure that's what he thought," I said. "He knew the men had been here looking for him. I was hiding him. He was my brother."

Ty's gasp of horror was followed by a rush of pity, and a new horror. "Your brother? And I . . ."

I caught his hand. "Don't be sorry. It's my fault, not yours. I tried to shield him. I ought to have known I couldn't help either of us—Pete or me. We're no good to our country or anyone else. We're the kind who can only take, never give—not even loyalty or service."

"But I killed him . . . I killed him," Ty kept saying hollowly. The officer said: "There will be an investigation."

And so the truth was told—the bitter truth I tried to hide. Told while Ty stood up for questioning on a murder in self defense. It was routine, they said, and brief. But it was long enough for Pa and Ma and Ty to hear the story of Pete's childhood and mine—or Lorna's life, past and present.

The only things they didn't mention was where Ty and I met, nor Sim's part in Pete's planned escape. Sim stayed for the hearing, white, pinch-faced, silent, watching as I sat with Ma and Pa, waiting, dreading, lest something go wrong and Ty might be held.

But the second day it was over, and Ty was acquitted. Sim was the first to rush forward and shake hands with him. Pa and I had to quiet Ma who broke down and wept for the first time. But they were standing right beside us, Ty so tall and strong, and Sim so little and cocky.

"You been a friend, Sim," Ty said gently. "I got to admit it was suspicion of you that brought me home early that day and got me into this trouble."

Sweat glazed Sim's face. "You've got nothing to worry about, boy," he said hastily. "I know when a woman loves her husband."

Then as Ty gathered Ma in his big arms, Sim drew me aside. "Honest, Jewel, that's what I came back to tell you that afternoon—that I'd try to help your brother but I wouldn't take you. From the look in your eyes, I knew once you went, only the worst would go with you. You had me scared, but I should have said it sooner."

"Thanks, Sim," I whispered, "but I guess it had to be as it was. There was no helping Pete, ever."

Ma, tears on her cheeks, was holding out her hand to me. "You poor child. No wonder you tried to put a good face on things. You and Ty will have to make it up in the future."

"You don't hold it against me?" I was looking at Ty.

"It wasn't your doing, hon," he said, almost sadly, "and I guess we're all sinners in some measure."

FORGIVENESS, that's what I found, and love and peace beyond all I ever dreamed or deserved, but never again like those first rapturous months.

That kind of happiness is gone, destroyed forever by a cloud of death and the memory that will never leave Ty—that he killed a man. I alone carry the thought of all the horror that might have been if I'd made that last terrible sacrifice to save Pete and destroyed us all.

THE END



# My Love Problem

*Continued from page 35*

answered my questions about when we would be married.

And then I heard that Jerry was going out with a girl regularly. I didn't believe it at first—how could he, writing me every day. But finally his last letter came, just a clipping announcing his marriage to the girl. At first I was heart-broken, miserable. And the shame of what had happened between us was even sharper. But gradually I realized that I had never loved Jerry.

I started going out on dates now and then, but I never met anyone I could care about . . . until Phil. I can't describe him. He isn't so good-looking, but he's good and fine and he loves me. I never knew how strong love really could be, until I met Phil.

He asked me to marry him . . . and I want to, more than anything in the world. But somehow I can't say "yes" with the guilt of my sin on my heart. One time Phil said to me, "You're so clean and decent, Betty. You don't know how much that means to a man—to have a girl whom he knows is decent and good. Working on a newspaper, you meet so many phonies, it makes you lose faith in girls." I blanched, but he didn't notice.

I know I'm decent and good, but would Phil think so if I told him what had happened that night? Or if somehow he found out, someone else told him? I'm afraid that if I married Phil, without telling him about that night, I would always be afraid that he might find out. Especially now that Jerry and his wife have moved back to our town. I think Jerry told his wife about me—why he did, I don't know—but once I met her at a party and she raked me with her eyes, and said very pointedly, "Jerry has told me *all* about you and him. I feel as though I know you." Jerry grew beet-red, but I said nothing and got away as soon as I could.

And yet, if I tell Phil before we marry, would he ever forgive me? And if he forgave, could he *forget*? Would that night always stand in the way of our complete happiness? I wish I knew.

You see now why I can't ask my father for his advice. I just can't. But perhaps there is one of you who can tell me what to do.

## • PROBLEM WINNER •

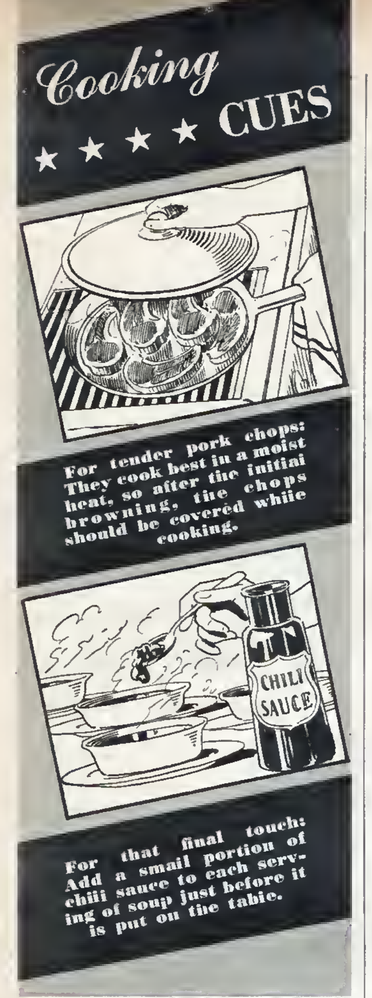
**Marion has asked us to extend her sincere thanks to you for your much needed advice. She is going to marry Ed on his furlough.**

•

**REAL STORY is presenting the cash prize for the best letter of advice to:**

**Mrs. J. B. Klein, Cadillac, Mich.**

**Read this month's love problem on page 35 of REAL STORY and help Betty to solve her problem. Your letter may be the winner.**




# I Found Love Too Late

*Continued from page 15*

I swayed dizzily against Elaine. Tom—hurt! "Is that any way to break it to her you fool," the other one broke in. "Tom's been in a little accident, lady. They're bringing him in now." He rushed off toward the highway.

"Get hold of yourself!" I heard Elaine hiss in my ear. "It's now or never. Slip over to my car—before the cops come back."

I shivered, hesitated, took two steps toward the car. And then I saw it. The truck drawing up across the road. Men getting out with deliberate care . . . a stretcher . . . a chalky-faced figure beneath a tumbled wet raincoat. I pushed free of Elaine's arm. In a daze, I moved through the falling rain towards that stretcher. Tom loved me—in his way! Oh, God, had I brought this upon him? Was this all to punish me, for trying to escape, for failing to appreciate the one I'd promised to cherish? He lay so still. I leaned over him in anguish. "Tom!" I whispered.

"Give him time, lady," said the big cop, and told me about the falling tree that had crushed Tom's car. The man in the truck behind him had seen his car crumple beneath it.

Elaine's big car slid past us into the highway as the men carried the stretcher into the lunchroom. I hardly noticed it.

It was a nightmare when the doctor came and made his examination. I couldn't have got through it without the patrolmen. They helped the doctor while I was sick on the back steps with the shock and the smell of the anesthetic.

"You'll have to have a nurse," the doctor told me before he left. "He's far too husky for a little thing like you to handle. And he'll be helpless a long time with that fractured leg. Shall I send someone from town?"

I looked at Tom questioningly. "No —nurse," he muttered faintly. "You'd better get Ed."

I gasped. "Your brother, Tom? Would he come?"

Tom stirred and the effort twisted his face with pain. "He'll come." He closed his eyes and turned away as if it were all settled.

"But Tom!" I moaned. "He doesn't know me—they have no phone at the island. How can I get him—what'll I say?"

"I don't give a damn what you say," said Tom. "You can row a boat, can't you? You know where the island is. Go and get him."

I found the rowboat moored at the edge of the dock and rowed out into the lake toward the lights of the house flickering dimly through the rain.

Nearing the shore, I sent the beam of my flashlight ahead of me looking for a landing place. It was then that another light answered mine.

"Follow my light in if you're looking for our dock," a man's voice called.

"Are you Ed?" I called out anxiously. "You've got to come back with me—Tom's been hurt—"

"You're Tom's wife?" came the startled question. "Here, throw me the rope."

I told him about Tom as he led me up the rocky path, helping me over the rough places, holding back the wet branches so they wouldn't snap in my face. The light from the porch streamed down the path, and in that yellow glow, I saw Ed for the first time. So like Tom, and yet so different. I'd have thought I was looking at Tom, until I met Ed's eyes. They were full of sympathy, friendliness—full of, yes, the understanding I'd sought in vain. "Why, you look just the way I thought Tom did—when I—" When I first knew him, I'd meant to say. When I loved him, trusted him. I choked back the rest of my sentence as we reached the porch where a frail, pretty old lady waited.

"This is Tom's wife, Mother," Ed explained. For a long unbelieving moment she studied me, then her arm was around me, and she lead me into the big comfortable room, seating me by the blazing wood fire.

Her keen eyes seemed to read my thoughts. "Tom's my son," she began. "I know him better than anyone else —you'd better tell me the whole story."

I told her, and she sighed with relief. "Thank God it's no worse," she murmured, as Ed came back into the room, carrying a suitcase.

"You're a good boy, Ed," she told him, as we were leaving. And to me she whispered, "Your life with Tom is your own business, of course, child, but if you ever need help—or friendship, you must come to me."

Ed helped me into the little rowboat, steadying my arm, balancing the tiny craft. "Be careful," he warned me. "The lake gets deep close inshore."

It was so pleasant to be taken care of. I was grateful for Ed's courtesy and consideration then, and in the hard days that followed. No one but Ed could have handled Tom, kept him comfortable, kidded him out of his ill humor. And as if that weren't enough, he helped me with the work, talked to me.

And as I came to know him, I appreciated him more deeply. He'd wanted to be a doctor, he told me, and it was then I found out why Tom never saw his family. The money for Ed's first year at medical school was ready, there in the house. Tom had wanted to buy the tourist camp—and when he hadn't been able to convince his mother it would be a good thing, he'd just stolen the money.

"You mean, you were packed up, ready to leave for the university, and then couldn't? But Ed—that's unforgivable!"

"Oh, I got over it," he told me cheerfully. "It's Mother who holds the grudge."

I'd have been like Ed's mother. I couldn't have forgiven either, or forgotten. But Ed was different. He made the best of things, put resentment out of his mind. He was so fine, so different! If I hadn't been with him so constantly, admiration might not have deepened into something more dangerous. But as soon as we'd made Tom comfortable in the morning, there were the cabins to freshen up, the showers to scrub, the endless round of duties that had been so

meaningless when I did them alone. They were fun now, with someone to help me, to laugh with me.

Tom only tolerated our friendship because in our moments together we got the work of the camp done. As soon as he was able to move around with a crutch, he limped after us, suspiciously, and I was afraid. Afraid he'd read what was written in my eyes, in my heart.

Can you hide love, ever, when it is real? A love that shakes your body with longing. Was I hiding it well enough—from Ed—from Tom?

My heart seemed to sink the night Tom practically threw his brother out of the place. "You must like our grub or our company," he grumbled unappreciatively, when Ed came in from the filling station to grab a sandwich. Ed looked up from scrubbing his hands, amazed at Tom's vindictive tone. Then he laughed.

"You're feeling better, aren't you?" he asked Tom. "I ought to have seen it. I guess you can make out without me. I'll be getting back to the island."

That evening, long after Tom had gone to bed, I sat on the porch in the bright moonlight. Ed would leave us in the morning. Could I go on, alone? Could I take up life where I'd left it the night of the storm? I had to see Ed. To talk to him once more before he left.

I knew just how insane I was when I stood in Ed's cabin, speechless, shaken.

"You shouldn't have come, Marylin," Ed gasped. "Tom'll take it out of you." He drew me outside, down the path toward the lake.

"He's asleep," I whispered through icy lips. "I had to come. I couldn't let you go without telling you—"

"Without telling me—what, Marylin," he prompted me gently. We sat down under a big oak, and Ed took my hands in his. "Is it true what I've been telling myself? That you feel as I do?"

I fumbled for words to hide my thoughts. "You've been good to us, Ed, to Tom—to me," I said. He knew what was in my heart, took me in his arms, and I clung to him as if I couldn't let him go.

"Hold me close," I whispered. "Because you're going away, and I'll never see you again. Hold me, Ed, keep me safe—for this little minute."

His hold on me tightened, his mouth sought mine in the only kiss I'd ever had of him. "Oh, my darling," he murmured brokenly, "I can't leave you here with Tom. He's a brute, a bully. No one knows it better than I do. I've seen—I've heard—you've got to come away with me . . ."

The words of consent were trembling on my lips when Ed's eyes narrowed to steely pin pricks. He pushed me from him violently as something glimmered in the moonlight, and trembled in the tree trunk. The razor-sharp carving knife! The one from the lunchroom. I screamed wildly as I recognized it, and knew that Tom had been there listening, watching in the dark!

"No, Ed," I shrieked, "he'll kill you!" But I couldn't stop the man I loved. He plunged through the foliage into the dark. When he returned, he was dragging his brother behind him. He jerked him to his feet as I watched, wrenched the carving knife from the tree and faced Tom.

"I missed you that time," Tom snarled, "but I won't—again. If I ever catch you with Marylin again, I'll kill you!" He reached for me, and drew me toward him, twisting my arm till I cried out.

In a sudden flashing move, Ed seized Tom once more, forced him to release me. "This is the last time you'll ever hurt that girl! I ought to kill you!" He stared scornfully at Tom. "But you're not worth it. Come on, Marylin."

My heart went out to him as he took my hand gently. But I knew what I had to do. To go to Ed would be to sign his death warrant. Through tense lips I forced the words I had to say. "I'm not going with you, Ed. I'm staying—with my husband."

The light went out of Ed's eyes. He stared at me, unbelievingly, before he turned without a word and walked into the dark.

IF Tom could only have left me alone in the days that followed, perhaps I could have steadied my nerves and played my part more convincingly. For it was a part I played—desperately—with Ed's life at stake. To conquer my loathing for Tom, to yield to his kisses, to convince him by my every act that Ed was nothing to me. It was black hell.

But I had to go through with it. I could never leave Tom until I'd allayed his suspicions of Ed. I couldn't save myself if it meant turning Tom's vengeance upon the one I loved.

I should have known better than to walk off alone into the woods that day. But I needed so to be alone—to find strength to go on.

At the lakeside, I paused to look across hopelessly at the dark pines on the island. Ed was there. Could I ever see him again? Would he understand what I'd done, if I told him? It was then that I heard heavy feet trampling the bushes behind me, an angry voice calling my name. Tom. His face flushed, his breathing hoarse as he came up to me and pinioned my hands to my sides.

"Damn you," he raged, "you thought you could sneak away—where is he—I'll kill him!"

"Oh, Tom," I said wearily, "there's no one here. You're hurting my arms."

That black look of disbelief. Tom thought I was lying. That I really had come there to meet Ed. His quick blow caught me full in the face. "That'll teach you," he muttered, standing over me like an ugly giant. "Get up, and stop your whimpering. And after this, don't leave camp."

That blow—it clarified my thoughts. I'd been a fool. You don't solve problems by pretense. Only the truth can clear things up and set you free. I fought back my sobs, and hurled the truth into Tom's suspicious face.

"I'm not pretending any longer! I despise you! I've despised you for months—and I'll leave you if I have to crawl to town on my hands and knees!"

I didn't care that his face went sallow—white under his sunburn. Had he really thought for a moment that I still loved him? "Marylin," he groaned brokenly, and took me into his arms. I jerked myself free and went up the path ahead of him to the camp.

Two men were waiting for him in the lunchroom. He stopped to speak to them. I went on to the bedroom and began to pack my things grimly. I didn't try to hide what I was doing when Tom came in.

"Don't touch me," I cried out at his possessive gesture! "I mean it, Tom! We're through!"

"Oh, no we're not" he defied me. "I won't let you go! I've got to drive into town with those men—they've come to collect those back taxes—but *you're* going to be right here when I come home!"

He flung open the closet door. And when his strong arms swung me off the floor, I knew in a moment of sickening realization just what he was going to do. I struggled—but what was the use? He threw me into the closet, and slammed the door shut on me. I heard the key turn on the outside. Then silence. He was gone.

I sobbed, beat upon the door with my fists, fought with unresisting darkness until I felt I was stifled. I had to get out of that closet. I had to get away—because I was going to Ed.

I fumbled along the wall, found a coat hook and loosened it from its place. It was a poor tool, but oh, dear God, I prayed, let it work. Could I use it to slip the latch? I wasn't sure, but I tried. Tried until the hook bent under the strain, until my face was wet with perspiration and tears. Still the latch held. Impatiently, I flung away the hook, and the dark closed around me, pressing down like a nightmare. I fumbled on the floor then, until I found the hook again.

The pointed end of the coat hook caught—slipped—then caught again. Held. The latch was giving. Beneath my hands it slid. I could push open the closet door. I could step out of that place—free!

The white birches gleamed through the pine trees on the island. The narrow white sand beach shone in the sunshine, but there was no one on the dock to see me as I rowed across the lake. I fastened the boat, there at the little landing, and made my way up the path. I never dreamed how dark that path might be when next I followed it.

*"If you ever need help—"* Tom's mother had said, *"you must come to me."* But when I opened the cabin door, she screamed, and her hand flew to her throat. "Ed—Ed," she called out, faintly, "Marylin's come—"

Ed rushed in from the next room, caught me in his arms.

"Ed," his mother said, "you must get her away from here before he knows she's gone. There's no time to lose!"

No time to lose! A sense of oppression, of looming terror was all around me. I would have hurried off at once, but Ed had arrangements to make, business to attend to, packing. When that was done, his mother insisted we must eat. It was at the table that we made our plans. We'd take the boat and cross the lake. We'd pick up Ed's car at the garage. And then the world lay before us. Reno first; then the life I'd dreamed of—good and beautiful and happy! Because I wasn't making a mistake this time. I knew what I was doing.

At the dock Ed drew me to him in a wordless embrace. He didn't have to tell me what he was thinking, that it was just the two of us from then on. That he knew my fear, that he'd take care of me. He bent to untie the rowboat, and I heard his muffled exclamation. "It's gone!" he gasped. "Maybe it's around at the other side of the dock," I whispered, because the creeping fear in my heart had almost paralyzed my tongue.

Ed fumbled in the dark. "It's not here," he told me.

"No, it's not there," came a voice I'd come to hate. "You're not leaving the island till I've had a reckoning with the two of you—"

Out on the lake, a boat was moving in the shadows. It came nearer—nearer. Tom! The keel of the rowboat grated on the sand close beside me. I clung to Ed, half crazy with fear, knowing the fury that threatened us.

Ed flung his arm around me, drew me close, and together we faced Tom, as he came toward us, and climbed up onto the pier.

"I've come to get Marylin," growled Tom, threateningly.

"You're too late," Ed answered. "You might as well go back. You have no right to her now, and you ought to know it."

"That's what you think," Tom snarled. He lunged at Ed, and bashed at his head. There was a dull thud and Ed fell to the dock. God! Tom had a gun! Quicker than thought I



**Tom forbid me to go swimming. "You're not going out half-dressed!" he shouted.**

flung myself upon him, tried to wrench the gun from his hand. Tom pushed me aside, the gun flickered in the dim light. I seized his arm. I must stop him somehow. "Don't—don't, Tom!" I begged. "I'll go back with you—I'll do anything you say—"

He tore from my clutching fingers—and for a dizzy, terrifying moment, I thought it was all over. But Ed struggled to his feet. Like a football tackler he flung himself against Tom's knees, the gun flashed again as they fell together—struggling, rolling back and forth there on the dock. Nearer the edge — nearer. That ghastly strength of Tom's—he was pushing Ed inch by inch closer to the water. I should have foreseen what would happen. There was no splash. The black water closed over Ed without a sound.

Tom straightened, reached for me with iron arms, and half dragged, half carried me to the rowboat. Ed was climbing back onto the dock, but not in time. I cowered on the floor boards of the rowboat as Tom climbed in behind me and pushed off.

Like a madman he forced the little boat through the water. Shivering, I pleaded with him for Ed. "I'll make it up to you, Tom. I'll never leave you again—I'll do anything you want—only you mustn't hurt Ed. You must let him alone!"

"I'll come back for him—after I'm through with you," Tom muttered. Then silence—a black mist of fear. I wanted to slip over the side of the boat into the friendly water. I could swim away in the dark before Tom knew I was gone. I could go back to Ed. But if I did, Tom would kill him. He would not miss again. I had to stay there, in an agony of fear, knowing that somehow I must make Tom calm down—even if I had to pretend to love him.

I hadn't known that there was another boat on the island—a light canoe pulled up out of sight under the trees that edged the water. Tom couldn't have known either as he climbed out on the dock and turned back to me.

His hands were like ice as they touched mine, but he pulled me up beside him, jerked me into his arms, kissed my lips violently, madly. "One last kiss!" he told me jerkily, "because now—you're going to pay—"

He forced me backwards, step by step, toward the black water. "It's deep here." His mad voice beat in my ears. "Deep and dark. You're afraid, aren't you. You should be—" At the edge, he held me for a long instant—then let me go—down, down into the icy water. The shot rang out before it closed over my head.

I took one stroke as I came to the surface, but only one, for Tom was swimming close to me in the water. I let myself go under, stayed until my lungs ached—and then—oh, God! He'd found me. He was pulling me to him. He'd held me under, he'd drown me—but the voice that spoke to me gently then wasn't Tom's! "Don't fight," it said. "You're all right. I've got you now."

Ed. I hadn't known, you see, about the boat, the canoe. I hadn't known he was close behind us there on the lake. I let myself float behind him, as he drew me through the water toward the shore. But the black desperate fear was upon me as he led me up the beach. "Ed! Be careful! He's desperate, insane! Where is he now? He mustn't see us."

"He won't see us" Ed said, and something in his voice made me understand. That shot while I was falling! I knew before I saw the big figure crumpled on the dock. Tom was dead. It was over.

Ed gave himself up to the police. The trial, those weeks that dragged out into an ordeal I hate to remember, all that lies behind us now.

Ed was acquitted, of course. He'd reached the dock that night to find Tom in the very act of murder—for Tom was a murderer. That's what the court decided.

I have the photoflash shots they made of me in the lobby of the courthouse. I look at them sometimes, at the tired unhappy girl whose dark-fringed eyes hold such a weight of suffering and sorrow! Pictures of something past, but only pictures, thank God! For those days lie far behind us now, and Ed, well, he tries to keep me from remembering most of the time.

The End

# HE FLEW FOR ENGLAND

***Real Story*** ★★★★★★

**BOOK-LENGTH TRUE NOVEL**

★★★★★ ***of the month***

### *Chapter One*

I WAS terribly happy, that Saturday morning, as I sat at my desk and stared at a photograph of a bomber on the wall. That afternoon Bill Allton was going to teach me to ski at the ski slide in a department store. He would help me buy some skis and an outfit, and the next day we were going to the White Mountains. I got up and looked in the mirror over the washbowl in the dressing closet. I saw a blue-eyed girl with fair, clear skin. Neat. Well groomed. Wholesome. But no beauty.

How I ached to be a beauty, for Bill! I loved him so much! He was clever and wonderful! Right now, behind the closed door of the private office, he was closeted with a very important Army Colonel. Air Transports was turning out three bombers a day now, but when Bill and the Colonel finished, we'd be ready to double that.

It was thrilling to work with Bill. But some day, perhaps, I wouldn't be coming to this office. Some day I'd belong only in Bill's personal life. Eating breakfast across the table from him, living in his house, wearing his wedding ring. . . .

Just then the phone pealed.

"Mr. Allton's office," I said. "Miss Whittaker speaking."

"Mr. Allton, please," said a feminine voice. It was a voice I didn't recognize. Rich, slightly husky, somehow rather arrogant.

"Mr. Allton is in conference now." I pulled my memo pad closer and reached for a pencil. "Would you like to leave a message? Or your phone number? I could have him call you back."

"No, I want to speak to him now."

"But he can't be disturbed. I'm sorry."

I wondered who she was. It sounded personal. Bill never had personal calls from women. I knew him so well! Knew that he shared an apartment with Corry Lord, the assistant plant manager. I knew that all his folks were in Iowa.

The girl at the other end snapped, "This is very important—I must speak with Mr. Allton! Tell him Miss Dinah Winters is calling."

I got up and knocked on the door of the private office. When Bill called out, "Come in," I stuck my head in.

"I'm so sorry," I said miserably, "but this girl on the phone insisted. Miss Dinah Winters."

"Dinah?" He looked surprised. And pleased. He whistled. "Throw the key, Lenore. I'll talk to her."

Back at my desk, the office seemed suddenly bleak. Dinah Winters. The name was familiar, but I couldn't place it. And it was personal, all right. Plenty personal.

I told myself I was being very silly, building a mountain out of a molehill. It *might* be a business call, some big shot's secretary. But I knew the voices of the secretary of the British Purchasing Board, and the Admiral in charge of Navy orders had a man secretary. . . .

I had pulled the second spoiled letter out of the typewriter and was balling it up furiously when Corry Lord stuck his head into the office.

As usual, his tawny hair was tousled. His tie was draped nonchalantly over his shoulder, because of the speed with which he tore through the plant. He was always getting some head of department out of a terrible jam, always smoothing out tangles here or thinking up new production methods there. Three times a day or more he tried new wrinkles in half a dozen departments and skated around to see how they were working out. As he said, "I make a lot of mistakes, and have to throw out a bunch of good ideas. But I'm still ahead. Only the boneheads never make any mistakes. They never try any improvements."

"Busy?" he asked me.

"Sort of."

"You're looking very perky this morning," he grinned.

"Oh, Corry, I have no time for nonsense now!"

"Nonsense?" His nice plain face took on an injured air. "I come halfway across the plant just to see you. I pay you a compliment, and you tell me it's nonsense!"

I couldn't help smiling. "Oh, Corry, it's nice of you, and I appreciate it. But I've got this report to type, and a couple of specifications to get out, and some contracts to check and letters—"

"In case you've forgotten," he said, "it's Saturday."

"That's what I mean."

"Oh." He stood there, looking down at me, and suddenly a curious embarrassment seemed to come over him. "Lenore," he said haltingly. "Lenore, listen, I—I've been wondering. There's a swell new play in town—I was reading a review of it last night—and I thought—"

My eyes jerked up with surprise. Corry and I were good friends in the office, occasionally we even lunched together when Bill couldn't join us at the table in the plant cafeteria. But he had never asked me for a date before.

"So would you?" he managed to get out at last. "I could phone for the tickets . . ." He grinned then. Sheepishly, he pulled an envelope out of his pocket. "Hell, I've got the tickets. I've had them for a week. I've tried to ask you seventeen different times, and each time someone barged in, or I lost my nerve, or—"

"Oh, Corry!" He was so sweet! He had a brash charm

where his work was concerned, a cocky self-confidence. With the other girls in the office, he had always been cool and kidding and a little off-hand. This shy, stumbling Corry was a different man entirely.

"You mean you—you will?"

"I can't, Corry! Oh, I'm so sorry, I'd love to—and you've had the tickets so long. But, Corry, I've got a date!"

"You have?" His face fell. "Oh. Oh, I should have known. With Bill, huh?"

"That's right." I looked down at my typewriter. "He's going to give me some ski lessons at Stacy's slide this afternoon and help me buy a pair of skis. Then tomorrow we're going out in the country."

"Um. Uh. Well," he gulped. His big fingers fumbled with the tickets and he made a swift motion, as if to rip them up. He checked himself. "Well, I could give these to Tim Lawson. His wife is expecting a baby and it would be a swell night out for them . . ."

"Some other time—ask me again," I said gently.

But his eyes, looking down at me, shadowed. "Fat lot of good it would do me," he muttered, "if Bill asked first. And I guess he has. I guess he has you booked up for life."

"Not quite, Corry," I laughed.

"Listen, Lenore—" He stopped. "Skip it. Maybe I'm not as smart as I think I am."

The intercom blared, "Mr. Lord please in the wing loft. Mr. Lord please in the wing loft." Corry gave me a swift salute and was gone.

HALF an hour later, Bill came out of his office. He was very tall, with broad shoulders and a lean tanned face. Bill wasn't exactly handsome, but there was strength in his jaw, health in his clear blue eyes, and a crisp aliveness about his dark hair.

His lips were firm and well cut. Always, I remembered, as my eyes lingered on Bill's mouth, the strength and the burning delight of his kisses.

The Colonel, a rigid, military figure in an immaculate uniform, was shaking hands with Bill cordially. "Oh, one thing more—" he said. Laughing, they went back into the private office.

I hurriedly cleaned off my desk. I had never skied, and Bill was an expert. We'd be leaving in a few minutes. I prayed that I wouldn't be too clumsy. I reached into the drawer for my handbag and counted out the money I'd need for the skis and one of those pretty ski pants costumes. I'd been saving since August! I had seen a lovely red one in a fashion magazine, trimmed with a huge green heart. It had a fur-lined hood. But I didn't think I'd have enough for that. "A green felt Dutch cap would be cute," I thought.

Skiing! The thought was exciting!

Since I had been going out with Bill, my whole world had become exciting. He took me to smart little bars I hadn't even known existed. He always wanted to do unusual things. Like watching the Universe at the Hayden Planetarium. Like leaping over the waves in a borrowed speed boat. Once we'd flown to Boston and back, just for dinner, in one of the company's ships. I remembered the ballroom in Harlem at which we'd spent a hilarious, rug-cutting evening surrounded by brown and yellow jive addicts; and the World's Eating Tour we'd conducted one week, starting at the Arabian "Sheik Restaurant" and ending up with smorgasbord in a Swedish place.

Nothing was ever commonplace or drab when I was with Bill. Even a walk down the street was exhilarating. I remembered the first time he'd kissed me—we had come home from a party at the airport—and he'd looked down at me in the dark hall of my little apartment house. "You look like a flower, Lenore. Your gray eyes and your black lashes like little antennae—or isn't that flower-like? Well, your mouth, then—your mouth's a rosebud." And swiftly, before I quite knew what he meant to do, he had bowed his dark head and his lips pressed to mine.

Nothing had ever been the same, since.

I was head over heels in love.

Bill's office door opened again. "Certainly, sir," he was saying to the Colonel. "I'll take care of it. I promise you, there won't be a single hitch. Just leave it to me."

"Goodbye, Mr. Allton. It's a pleasure to meet a man who knows what it's all about. You wouldn't believe the ruckus we've had with some of the other plants." He added, as an afterthought, "Noticed any of the English flyers about? I've lost some of my best instructors to the school here on the field."

"You can't help noticing them," Bill laughed. "They're all over. We've had quite a few make a tour of the plant. Nice boys."

I remembered the fair-haired boy with the curiously attractive, light eyes who had gone through the plant yesterday. He had stopped here in the office with Corry, and asked me a lot of questions. He had stared at me, too, and smiled. "You American girls are so different from English girls, somehow," he'd said. "I say, I don't mean to be cheeky, but—"

"It's quite all right," I had smiled. "That is, if you meant it for a compliment."

"Indeed, I did. Why, a bloody fool I'd be if I didn't!"

We had all laughed, and then he had flushed. He had a very fair complexion, and he turned quite pink.

After Corry had finished taking him through the plant, he had come back and leaned against my desk and talked some more. "It's marvellous," he'd said enthusiastically. "So efficient! I dare say we have similar plants in England, but there's something about this—some spirit—and it's so huge and new!"

"It was built in about six months," I explained. "Swift."

"The up-to-the-minute gadgets, the controlled temperatures in some of the lofts—and the general knowingness of even your workers—quite the fellows, they are!"

Then he asked, shyly, "What's your name? I don't believe Mr. Lord introduced us properly. I'm Claude Lallingham."

"My name's Lenore Whittaker."

We had shaken hands. He bowed over my hand nicely, his big, clean paw holding my fingers in a sort of respectful, formal little rite that was amusing and yet somehow touching.

"Hope I'll be seeing you about," he said.

"I suppose you will. If you have any time to notice. I know they keep the students frightfully busy over there."

"I've flown before. Oh, not that I won't be busy! It's the bomber flying and the instrument and weather stuff I'm learning—all of us, in fact. No tyros, you know, in this lot. Sort of a secondary course."

"I see."

"I say, do you ever lunch at that restaurant—"

"The beanery?" I laughed. "I'm allergic to ptomaine. We have a nice cafeteria right here at the plant."

"Then I must lunch there some time," he said.

"Consider yourself invited!"

"Cheero," he said, going out. It didn't sound affected or stilted. "Cheer—o." Not the funny "Cheerio" I'd heard supposedly English characters say in movies.

Bill was back in his office now, hastily glancing over the letters I'd typed and signing them. It was a quarter of one already. I took out my mirror and lipstick.

I was carefully rouging my mouth when he came out. I looked up, half expecting the usual jocular comment from him whenever he caught me putting on lipstick. Then, suddenly, my hand holding the lipstick dropped to the desk. Bill looked so strange! Stunned, as if he'd just remembered something.

"Lenore," he said. "Lenore, I'm a heel! I completely forgot about our date this afternoon!"

It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "Well, you've remembered it now." But I didn't. Some instinct warned me to be still, to sit quietly, to make a mask of my face.

"Oh, Lenore, this is awful! I—I promised Dinah Winters that I'd take her to lunch and some afternoon shindig out on Long Island afterward."

But he could phone and tell her he had a previous engagement he'd forgotten. Dinah Winters. Suddenly, I remembered who she was. I'd seen her picture in the papers. Often. Everybody had seen it. Dinah Winters, whose mother had divorced her father and then married him again, in one of the most spectacular, talked about affairs . . .

I remembered her picture. She had long, tilted eyes, and a very full, very red mouth. I remembered the lace hood she'd worn in that picture in *Scene* magazine. Dinah Winters at a party. . . . Dinah Winters in Hollywood, and at the race track. Dinah Winters with Count so-and-so, with Mr. this-and-that, multi-millionaire; with Senator somebody-or-other. . . .

There was a terrific silence. Bill looked at me, pleadingly; he looked away again and groaned. "What am I going to do?"

Carefully, I said at last, "Oh, it doesn't matter about our date, Bill. I—I can practise at the ski-slide by myself. There's an instructor, isn't there?" I wanted to say, "Of course you can't stand her up. She's too important." But it might come out sarcastically, and I didn't want to be sarcastic.

Bill grasped at that. "Gosh, yes. You're swell, Lenore. Any other girl would be spitting bullets. And she'd be right. It was unpardonable of me! I—I—"

"After all, you see me every day."

He grinned, in an appealingly boyish way. "Matter of fact, I only met her last week. She was with her father at this finance-government dinner. I never expected her to remember me!"

My heart sank. He was flattered. Any man would be flattered . . . and she had called him up, arrogantly, self-confidently, and asked him to take her to lunch.

I picked up the lipstick again. Bravely, I finished my mouth. "It's perfectly all right, Bill. I don't mind. We—we still have tomorrow."

I should have gone with Corry Lord. I'd be alone tonight. Alone, remembering that Bill was with Dinah Winters.

"The instructor at the store's better than I'll ever be," Bill said. "You'll learn a lot more."

## Chapter Two

I COULDN'T have forgotten a date with Bill . . . I had thought, vaguely, in that dreamy way, about being his wife. But did he mean that when he kissed me? Was his talk of love what the old-fashioned aunts who'd brought me up had called "true-talk"? Had Bill ever once considered asking me to be his wife? I was a perfectly ordinary girl. His secretary. Fun to dance with and to kiss. But not important enough, maybe, to marry.

Dinah Winters. Any man would be dazzled by her. Those tilted eyes, that lush and sultry mouth. And she had millions.

Something inside me wept. But I tried to push it away, I tried to be sensible. This didn't mean I was losing Bill! A girl like Dinah, she probably called up the most interesting men she met whenever she felt like it, and then she went out with them once or twice, ran through them, forgot about them. She must have dozens of more handsome, more important men than Bill Allton on her string.

I was curiously reluctant to leave the office. I didn't want to tackle that ski-slide. There wouldn't be any fun in lessons from a bored professional at a big store where hundreds of dubs wanted ski instructions along with their ski suits.

I had giggled, yesterday, "Bill, I'll fall down a thousand times a minute. I'll make myself ridiculous!"

Now I didn't want to make the effort. I dreaded being clumsy, falling, with only strangers around, with no one to laugh with.

So that was how it happened that at two-thirty, when Corry Lord flew past the door, his tie draped over his shoulder as usual, he heard the sound of my typewriter. He checked his headlong flight, slipped, and skidded back to the door.

"You'll break your neck like that, some day!" I said tonelessly.

"Hey, what happened to you? Thought you had a date?" His eyes narrowed. "You look as though someone put your lights out. You were sparkling, this morning."

"The light's out, all right," I mumbled bitterly.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Watch it then, honey. You're thinking too loud!"

I didn't answer.

"Why are you working, anyway? What happened to the date?" he demanded.

"It dissolved."

"Bill get tied up?" he asked, scratching his head. His nice face was bothered. "Some Admiral collar him, or any trouble come up? I hadn't heard."

I hated myself, but I simply couldn't explain about Dinah Winters. "It—it's a sort of aftermath of that government-finance dinner," I explained weakly.

"I see." But he didn't see at all. "Then are you free this afternoon and tonight?"

"I thought I'd catch up on my work."

He picked up the black typewriter cover and jammed it down on the machine. "Get your hat, Lenore!" His shyness of the morning had evaporated. "We're going stepping!"

He took my new coat off the clothes-tree. "Say, this is nice!" He held it for me. The luxurious feel of the fur comforted me. I stroked a sleeve. "I shouldn't have bought it. It cost so much. But I love it."

"You look marvellous in it. What do you mean, you shouldn't have bought it? The best is none too good for you."

"This isn't the best, Corry."

Dinah Winters probably had mink.

"Have you lunched yet?"

"No."

Corry dragged me down the corridor to his own office. There was a harried man in there with a blueprint. Corry grinned. "Have a chair, Miss Whittaker. Any year now we'll be pardoned."

They spread the blueprint out on the long table and pored over it for half an hour.

IT WAS after three when we walked out of the copper and marble entrance, with its huge, flapping eagle poised above the letters, AIR TRANSPORTS.

Corry's car was parked in the lot. "I have to buy another one," he said. "They're getting scarce or something. But I haven't had time. Sa-ay! Let's go pick one out after we eat!"

I tried not to think of Bill Allton and Dinah Winters. "That sounds interesting. I've never bought a car. What kind do you want?"

"Just like this one," he laughed. "Only I want it to have better brakes and a differential that's not about to go haywire."

"You could have ordered it over the phone, silly!"

"But the color," he said, with pretended gravity. "We've got to get a color that harmonizes with your eyes. Or the dress you're going to wear the next time you go out with me. Or something."

I made a face at him. He said, nosing into the highway, "I couldn't match your eyes, at that. They don't put out cars in changeable colors. This morning they were blue. When I caught you with the lights out they were blackish-gray—slate-gray. And now, they're a serene and rain-washed green." He stepped on the brake suddenly and the car jerked. "Woman, have you been crying?"

"Why should I be crying?" But I couldn't control the blood rising in my throat, I couldn't control the heightened color under my eyes.

Corry said no more. He asked me where I wanted to eat. "Any place. It doesn't matter."

"Where does Bill take you?"

"Let's not go there!" I cried sharply.

His face was thoughtful. We ended up at a Chinese restaurant and Corry explained, "Every time I have chow mein I become ravenously hungry two hours later. Since it's nearly four, we'll have dinner right on time—in time to make the play." He grinned. "You see, I couldn't give the tickets away after all. Lawson says his wife won't stick her nose out of the house. He said she's praying for the party, so she cut up her present tent-like dress into black confetti."

"I can well understand it."

There was soft music from a juke-box in the restaurant. As we sat down, I suddenly remembered, "I was supposed to be taking ski lessons this afternoon!"

"That's right. With Bill."

He seemed eager and excited. "Say, that's grand! Bill and I were suckers for the sport in college! We used to bob-sled, too. You'd love that! Listen, hurry up, take lessons—we'll ride the next ski train into the White Mountains!"

"I'm sorry, but Bill has already spoken for that date. We're going tomorrow."

"There are a lot of week-ends in a winter," said Corry, unsquelched.

A little twist of doubt attacked me. Tomorrow. Without lessons, I'd make a pretty mess of myself! Would Bill even phone me? There was no reason to think that just because once he went out with Dinah— But I did think so. I couldn't help it. "She's a man-eater," I said, under my breath.

"There you go, thinking too loud again!"

"I'm sorry. From now on, I'll devote myself to you. Tell me the story of your life, Mr. Lord."

"Oh, sure. Well, I was born. I almost didn't make it. They tell me I was only four pounds and had to be fed whiskey from a dropper."

"Spare me the details. The whiskey habit was started early. That's what counts."

"Hey, that's not fair! I never get drunk! You ought to see Bill sometimes." He stopped. He was horribly embarrassed. "I didn't mean that."

"Bill has already told me how you sobered him up in some Massachusetts small town and saved him from being suspended."

Corry smiled reminiscently. "It was quite a night. But then, road show musical comedies didn't come through very often, and a college boy does get starved for a chorus girl."

"We missed all that in Brooklyn Business Academy," I said with a smirk. "We were very moral, because we were all poor."

"I was poor, too," Corry said. And now he wasn't laughing. "I got through on a scholarship and a coal shovel. Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't." It made me respect him more. It seemed

to give me a clearer insight into his integrity. Suddenly, I knew that he had worked even harder in college than he was working now at Air Transports. "It seems impossible," I said. "I wonder you can stand the pace."

"I'm built like an ox," he said. "With a brain to match. I get there by plugging, but I'm no brilliant comet. It takes me a while."

"That's not true." I knew too well how brilliant he was, and to what extent the power of his ideas had helped Air Transports to achieve the most efficient bomber in the history of aviation.

"Well, let's rush out and buy that car," he said, after the last dish had been cleared and the last cigarette crunched out. "Maybe they'll close up on us."

"Do you really want a car?"

"Sure I do! Listen, I wanted a car for years so badly I could taste it. I promised myself that when I could afford cars, I'd have a new one every two years. And I've stuck to it."

I couldn't help asking as we drove to the showroom, "Was Bill Allton poor, too? I mean, did he have a scholarship?"

"No, he had an uncle," Corry grinned. "I roomed with him—he paid seventy-five percent and I paid twenty-five percent." He shook his head. "I've tried to talk him into a similar arrangement for the apartment we share now—but it's no dice. I did step on him hard when he wanted that Filipino manservant."

My lips quirked. "I didn't know Bill had such colossal ideas."

The salesman in the showroom greeted us with open arms. We looked at all the models on the floor, and I stopped Corry forcibly from trying out a deluxe seven-passenger job with about a million extras.

"It's not practical," I said flatly.

"Practical! You're not really practical, are you? Don't you ever long for some simon-pure useless froth?"

Illogically, I thought of Bill again. No, I wasn't very practical. A practical girl would have straightened out exactly what all those dates and kisses meant—a practical girl would have said, "But, Bill, I turned down a date for you! Besides, we've had this date for a week; and besides—"

"Hey, come back here!" Corry cried. "Don't you care what kind of car I buy?"

"You know I care."

We looked at a maroon-colored roadster with tons of chromium. The salesman said, "If you like this one, better grab it. There won't be much nickel and chromium used any more, you know."

"The war," Corry said, queerly. "Can't get away from it even here, can we?"

I remembered Claude Lallingham. He'd be going back to fly for England when his instrument and weather course was over. He'd be flying Air Transports. The English had named them Spite Fleets. He'd be dropping bombs over blacked-out cities, flying back through fog and rain and darkness across the Channel after the bombing racks were empty. If he were lucky, that is, he'd be flying back.

"Are you going to keep making those mental journeys?" Corry demanded.

"Nothing gets by you, does it?"

"Very little about you," he admitted. "I happen to enjoy looking at that face."

## *Chapter Three*

"IT'S TOO late for ski lessons," I said as we came out of the showroom. "I ought to wash my hair tonight. Oh, Corry, I haven't bought a ski-suit!"

"Fine. Now you can't go with Bill tomorrow."

"You'd better stop sabotaging that!"

"If I thought I had half a chance . . ." His voice trailed off. Repeatedly, I had gotten the impression that there was something about Bill that bothered him. Something that he wanted to tell me, and held back. Or was I imagining that? He'd told me about the drinking and the chorus girl. I mustn't get edgy.

We went to the play. It was about a Londoner and the blitz, and while it was cheerful and amusing, there was an undercurrent of stark reality that brought the tears to my eyes. "Corry, do you suppose it's really like that? People dying in the streets, but still shaking their fists at Hitler?" I asked as we stood in the lobby during an intermission.

"Sure. Lots of the boys I went to school with are ferrying bombers, you know. I thought for a while I might do that, too, but the Old Man wanted me right where I am." The Old Man was Henry W. Mittenheimer, our president, and I knew Corry was a favorite of his.

"You're doing much more good where you are, Corry. It's silly to think only the ones who fly and fight are doing their bit. It's as if I suddenly developed a yen to go over and nurse wounded Tommies—when really, in the office, speeding up all the endless details of production and so on, I'm of much more use."

"The lass *is* practical," he said.

And then I saw them. Suddenly, as a group of people moved and scattered, there was Bill Allton's face above the dark wings of his dinner coat. And then, smiling up at him, I saw her. Dinah Winters. There was no mistaking her. She wore a wisp of net over her hair. It was sprinkled with golden stars. Her long eyes were shining, as she laughed at something he said. Her mouth curved like red satin.

Corry heard my breath drawn inward, he saw the stiff look on my face, and his head turned. For an endless moment, while Bill Allton held a match to the long cigarette in Dinah Winters' scarlet-nailed fingers, there was no sound.

Corry's hand touched mine. "Come, Lenore."

It was somehow shameful to be beating this swift retreat away from Bill's eyes. But I thought I'd die if he saw me.

My heart was a sick, wounded thing inside me. I stumbled. Corry's hand steadied me.

"Do you want to see the rest of this?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied, through stiff lips. I hadn't any real claim on Bill. He'd been honest enough with me. He'd told me he was going with her. What if he did say it was a shindig on Long Island? Perhaps that was what she'd told him. Or maybe that was only for cocktails. . . . I didn't own him. I had no right to feel like this. As if he'd stabbed me. As if he'd been unfaithful.

Jealous, that was what was wrong with me. Jealous because she was beautiful and rich and desirable, and beside her I was nothing—just a girl, like thousands of other girls. Not clever, not lovely, not even rich. Bill was too good for me.

"Lenore," Corry was saying urgently. "Lenore."

I smiled at him. His face was blurred, because my eyes were swimming. But I smiled.

And then the curtain went up, and the darkness surrounded me and hid my idiocy.

Afterward, when the last round of applause had died, I talked with Corry about the play. "Wonderful. I suppose it is like that, in London. It's the courage of the little people that counts, after all, isn't it?" Courage. I must have courage.

Bill and Dinah were sitting in the fourth row, I saw now. They seemed to be with a party of other couples, all in evening clothes. I couldn't take my eyes away. Their backs were toward me, it was safe enough. I saw him lift a coat, I saw him hold it for Dinah, as Corry was holding mine for me. Yes, I had been right. Dinah Winters owned a mink coat. Richly brown with a faint blue overcast. Even at this distance and in this light, I could see it was exquisite—worth a fortune. My Hudson seal seemed cheap and ugly, then.

"Courage," Corry was saying. "The one thing people can't fake. The one thing that counts."

I squared my shoulders. I smiled at him. "What do we do now?"

He understood. "Dance?"

I don't remember the rest of that night. I only remember that at last we were going home in the car. At last there was the light of my apartment-house lobby, my key was in Corry's hand, the little click of it in the latch.

"We must do this again," said Corry. "I enjoyed it so. Lenore, I—I've never had a better time with a girl in my life."

"But you can't buy a car every Saturday afternoon," I smiled.

"It wasn't the car. You know it wasn't." His hands came up. He touched my shoulders. He looked down at me. "Will you, Lenore? Will you go out with me again?"

"Yes, Corry."

"Do you suppose I'll ever be able to cut Bill out?" he asked.

"Maybe—" I couldn't help it, it was cowardly and stupid. "Maybe there isn't any need to cut Bill out. Maybe he's bowed out already."

"Oh, darling!" he said, low. "Don't let it hurt you so! Don't!"

"Goodnight, Corry. You've been swell."

"Shall I call you in the morning?"

I tried to sound light, but my voice didn't quite make it. "B-better give B-Bill a chance to c-call first."

BILL called early Sunday morning. Relief was like a tight-sprung wire inside me, suddenly snapping free.

"Ready for skiing?" he asked.

"Oh, Bill! I didn't even buy skis! I have no suit, nothing."

He laughed. "It's probably just as well. I got in late last night, and have been batting the sleep out of my eyes. But I didn't want to disappoint you. Suppose we put it off until next Sunday?"

"If you'll go with me for the ski lessons and the shopping next Saturday," I bargained shamelessly.

"You know I will."

There was a pause. I was hoping he'd say, "Can't we spend today together anyway?"

But he didn't. He said, "Now I can go back to bed. You have no idea how worn out I am." He laughed. "Dinner with me tonight?"

"I'd love it, Bill."

I washed my hair that afternoon. I wanted achingly to be as beautiful for Bill's eyes as Dinah was. Of course, I couldn't be. Never! She was glamorous, gorgeous. I simply couldn't compete with her on her terms. But I could be the prettiest possible for Lenore Whittaker. I could listen to Bill, flatteringly, and be interested in him, and make him think he was wonderful. "Men take out the Dinahs," I thought fiercely. "But they marry girls like me." That was for reassurance, that wishful thought. Reassurance because against a blindingly brilliant star like Dinah I wasn't even a soft candle flame.

Corry phoned at three. "Have I been cut out?" he asked directly.

"You certainly have, my lad!" My voice sang.

"Never mind, I'm the never-say-die type. May I date you up for tomorrow night?"

"I may have to work late, Corry. And does that mean you have abandoned your own habit of working until midnight?"

"It doesn't, if you won't help me."

"See you in the office tomorrow, Corry."

"You will if Bill's out of sight," he said. "Well, I could lock him in a closet. 'By Lenore."

"Goodbye, Corry."

I'll never forget that dinner with Bill. Never forget his eyes across the table, and his fine blunt hands on the cloth. I'll never forget the way he laughed, and the way he said, "You're looking very special tonight, Lenore."

Because that was our last dinner together. I didn't know it, then. And yet something inside me drank him in—as if I'd have to remember the way his hair grew, and the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled, and the way his firm mouth softened when he spoke. As if I wouldn't be seeing him again . . . which was silly, because I saw him every day, in the office.

Only the Bill Allton I saw in the office wasn't the Bill with whom I walked through the soft, drizzling dark of that Sunday night.

"Cab?" he asked.

"No, let's walk." It was good to feel his shoulder against mine, good to look up at his height, good to know the touch of his hand as he helped me across a puddle. The lights were blurred in the drizzle, and in the pavement there was the golden glowing of reflected lamps.

We had never been so close. There was something between us, that night. Something, I told myself bitterly, afterward, that would never have died if Dinah Winters had let him alone. But she had him in her clutches already. . . .

At my door, Bill asked, "May I come in?"

"Oh, yes, you must dry out, or you'll catch your death of cold!"

I gave him my key to open the door. In the hallway, just before he turned it in the lock, he smiled down at me with a look that sent my heart racing. There was something intimate and warm in his eyes—something tremulously wonderful about the thought of us, entering a still apartment, on this rainy night, together.

At the touch of my finger, the living room sprang into light. "Aha!" Bill cried with satisfaction. "A fireplace! The perfect spot to get dried out in!"

He took off his coat, and I hung it in the little foyer closet. My own coat, on the hanger next to it, seemed different from the way our coats looked in the office closet. Bill went to the fireplace and examined the kindling in the basket.

I said, "Coffee?"

"We've just eaten . . . but coffee."

Dinah Winters wouldn't make coffee for him, I thought. Dinah Winters wouldn't walk in the rain with him, either. She'd die before she'd get her shoes wet or hop over puddles!

As the coffee perked, I slipped into the bedroom. The bottom of my dress was damp and dragged at my knees. I took it off, brushed out my hair, got into a housecoat I rarely had time to wear. It was a cool, lovely green, and made my eyes seem cool and green, too.

"Hey, what happened to you?" Bill called. His jaw dropped as I came slowly into the room. "Sa-ay!" He gulped. He stared, couldn't seem to take his eyes away. At last he grinned, "You never know what TNT is hiding under a simple, dark dress, do you? Lenore, I'm flabbergasted."

"Not too flabbergasted to drink some coffee, I hope. It's ready."

He ran into the kitchen after me. An epidemic of helpfulness seemed to have overcome him. He took down the cups from the cabinet, rushed the sugar bowl to the table so quickly that he spilled half of it. He rummaged for the broom, tried to sweep the sugar into the dustpan while his eyes were still rivetted on me.

"Let me," I laughed, bending.

"Oh, no! Dreams don't sweep up sugar!" He straightened, holding the dustpan carefully. "But dreams are sweet, huh? That's not even a decent gag."

Smiling, I poured the coffee. "Oh, Bill," I thought, "if only I could pour your coffee for you the rest of our lives!"

"Even your hands are lovely," he said. "I never before noticed what beautiful hands you have."

He imprisoned one of my hands in his. The touch was like electric, quivering up my arm. I shivered, and then Bill had my other hand. He was looking into my eyes. "Lenore!" he whispered. "Lenore!" And it was as if he had made a startling and incredible discovery, as if new light were blazing for him on a familiar place—as if the world had changed, and he with it.

Still holding my hands, he came around the table. Without a word, with only that look in his eyes, he was gathering me up into his arms. My breath caught. I could feel my heart pounding, and a little melting warmth inside me spreading and swelling. And then his mouth was on mine. Hard. Fierce. He was kissing me with an intensity that none of those other kisses had ever had. This kiss seemed to draw my very heart up out of my breast—a kiss that invaded my blood and my bones, that had me limp and surrendering in his arms.

"Darling," he breathed at last. "Darling, you kissed me back! You know you did! You never kissed me back before."

"You never kissed me at all before. Not like that. Oh, Bill, I love you so! I love you so!"

"I love you too," he said. "Lenore, darling." His arms tightened around me again, and he was kissing me. And once more the universe tottered and faded, once more there was nothing beyond the sweetness of his mouth on mine.

When he let me go, I was breathless. We looked into each other's eyes, and then I put my head on his shoulder. The stuff on his coat scratched my cheek, but it felt good. Safe. Dear.

His lips in my hair, Bill said, "Think of me being so dumb all these months! I knew there was something the matter with me, but I didn't know what. You were cute, and I liked dancing with you. I liked taking you out. I even liked kissing you. But, Lenore, how could I have kissed you and missed—" His voice trailed off. How could he have kissed me and missed this storm of feeling that was rising now to crescendo.

He laughed, deep in his throat. "What fools we mortals be! Heaven waiting—and I stuck to dancing." His finger crept under my chin. He was lifting my head. "Look at me, darling. Why didn't you tell me?"

"But I didn't know."

"Oh, yes, you did! You knew!"

Suddenly, his arms swooped around me and he was lifting me high. "Darling, darling, you're the most wonderful thing that ever lived. Oh, Lenore, I love you so! I feel as if I'd been born again—as if life is starting over. Oh, honey!"

"What are you going to do?" I laughed. "Put me down!"

But Bill didn't put me down. And fear, like the first curl of smoke which presages the blazing holocaust, seeped inside me.

His arms were so strong! So tight around me! His breathing was quick and harsh. I was frightened. I didn't want to be, but I couldn't conquer my fear. Then he kissed me again. His lips were hungry, now. Cruel, almost; and so demanding.

"Lenore!" he said huskily, burying his face in my hair. "Lenore!"

Blindly, I struggled away. My hands pressed at his chest. "Bill, stop! I'm afraid!" I was sobbing, and trying to get out of his arms. "Bill, please. I'm so afraid!"

He stumbled, and slowly his arms released me. He set me on my feet carefully. Dizziness gripped me. The hunger in his eyes, the terrible longing—and now that sick, stunned surprise.

"Why, you're crying! Lenore, how can you be afraid of me? Don't you love me?"

I dashed the tears from my eyes. "Yes, yes, of course I love you. But—" I pushed my knuckles into my mouth. "Oh, Bill, we've got to keep our heads! We can't let ourselves go!"

Somehow, the loss of his arms around me was like a void, now. I had wanted him to let me down, but now I wanted to be back in his arms again. I loved him so! And I had hurt him. I didn't mean to hurt him. I moved closer, pleading. "We—we can kiss and—and—but it's not a game. It's dangerous. Emotion gets so strong. Bill, it's bigger than we are. Dynamite. We—we mustn't play with it."

I was saying it badly. If only he'd take me in his arms! If only he'd be tender and comforting, understanding my fear! I did want his arms and his kisses, but not now, not yet, that other, stronger emotion that had blazed in his eyes.

"Play?" he asked, queerly. "I'm not playing, Len."

I bowed my head. The hot blood stained my throat. "I know, Bill. But I—" It was something too sacred to be spoiled this way. The hunger in his eyes, the yearning in his voice, hurt me. Something wild and lawless inside myself leaped up to respond—and we mustn't. Later. After we were married. This was the most solemn step two people could take, and we must take it honestly and openly, with our heads high and pride in our hearts and not like this—on a rainy night, in a quiet apartment—not like this.

But I hadn't the words to tell him. Somehow, my withdrawal had in it the quality of caution, of grudgery—and I knew it.

"I don't mean to—to quibble, Bill. I love you. I've never loved anyone like this. I couldn't love anyone more. I want to be generous, and brave—but I'm so afraid! And it isn't right!" My lips were quivering. Through tear-blinded eyes I looked up at him. "Do you see, Bill?"

It was as if a shade had been drawn down over his eyes. Hooded now, blank, unreadable, they looked at me. "Yes," he said tonelessly, "I see. A girl can't be too careful."

"Oh, no, Bill! No!" It was a tortured cry, dragged from me. "I don't mean it like that. Please try to understand! I love you, I—"

"I told you," he said steadily, "I quite understand." In a completely changed manner he said, "It must be awfully late. Let's down that coffee, if it isn't cold by now. I'd better be going."

I ran to him, my hands on his arms. Almost, it was as though I were on my knees to him. "Bill, don't! You mustn't take it like this! It isn't for myself that I'm afraid, darling. I don't want to soil it, taint it. I don't want our love to be sneaky and shoddy—we're too fine for that. It's an insult to our love. Oh, Bill, how can I explain? I've loved you for so long! Since I first came to Air Transports! I want us to be proud and hold our heads high. Darling, when you kiss me, nothing else matters—and I almost forgot." My voice broke. "One more kiss, Bill, and I would have given you my soul! But it isn't right! We're not that kind of people!"

"What kind of people do we have to be to love?" he asked.

"Bill!"

His hands came up. He pried loose my fingers on his arms. Gently, but unmistakably. "It's all right, Lenore," he said, wearily. "I can't blame you. Maybe it *was* an insult. Maybe I'm a heel."

He was reaching for his hat, looking about for the wet coat. "Bill, don't go!"

"But if I don't," he said, his mouth twisted, "I'm apt to become a great deal more unpardonable."

As if I were frozen, as if a great weight crushed me, I couldn't move. I stood there as he shrugged into the coat, as he put his hat on. Pain was like a beast inside me, chained now, but almost free.

I wanted to cry out. "Bill!" I wanted to run after him, to pull him back, to say, "If you want me—if you really love me, nothing else matters. Oh, don't go! I can't lose you! I can't!"

I could only stand there motionless, silent, my body trembling and my hands curled into fists.

"Goodnight, Lenore."

And still I couldn't speak.

The slamming of the door was cruelly loud. There was something dreadfully definite about it. As if Bill had put an end to what had gone before, here in this apartment. Finished. Done with.

I sank into a chair, and I couldn't control the heaving of my shoulders, the racking sobs which welled up inside me. I had lost him! Lost him, before ever I had had him. Oh, if only I had made him see it the way I meant it. I thought of his eyes, staring at me so blankly. *"Playing?"* he had said. *"I wasn't playing."*

"Bill," I sobbed. "Bill, come back!" And it seemed to me then that if only I had the courage, I would run out after him. I would say, "It's all right, Bill. I love you enough for anything. Only come back! Come back!"

But I didn't have that courage. Some indomitable pride, some last-ditch resistance wouldn't let me. Because now it was too late. I didn't want Bill on those terms, and he didn't want me like that either. We must come together in love—in genuine, ever-lasting marriage.

Marriage. I sat up very straight. Suddenly I remembered. Not once—not when he kissed me, not when he had held me in his arms, not ever, in the two hours we had been here—had Bill talked of marriage. "I love you," he said. But not, "Marry me."

Was it that omission which my conscious mind hadn't so much as recorded, which had kindled that fear in my deeper self? Was it that which had spoiled and cheapened the glory of being in Bill's arms?

## *Chapter Four*

IN THE morning, Bill's coat wasn't in the closet when I hung up my own. I put together in my mind the words I would say to him. "Let's forget last night, Bill. I acted like a panicky school girl. Can't we start all over? As if—as if we've just met?"

But maybe I ought to let him speak first. Maybe I should keep control, trying to guard my eyes and my mouth, until he said something. Would he apologize? Would he say, "Forgive me, I lost my head."

By ten o'clock, I was so nervous I couldn't sit still. Where was Bill? Wasn't he coming in today?

Hilda Marshall, who was Henry D. Mittenheimer's secretary, came into the office just then. "Why don't you do a little work around here, with your boss on the West Coast?" she demanded. "We're waiting for those reports!"

"The West Coast?" I gasped.

Hilda stared at me. She had black eyes and a black pompadour that seemed to be eternally bobbing right over her sharp little nose. "For Pete's sake, doesn't anybody tell you anything around here? I thought you were supposed to be Allton's right-hand man? He took the dawn plane to San Diego."

I turned and pulled out a file drawer. "I thought he was going next week," I managed to say.

"So did we," she retorted sweetly. "How about a few reports for the boss?"

After she was gone, I stood there at the file case, my mind spinning. Bill didn't have to go to San Diego right now. There were several jobs still to be cleaned up—things he'd need on the West Coast. Why had he gone? On account of last night? It seemed incredible. But there it was.

The empty feeling inside me spread. My fingers shook. "I'll have some coffee," I thought. "I must work. I can't let this get me."

My wrist watch said eleven forty-five. I had been standing here, like a girl of stone, for more than an hour.

Carefully, I drew myself a brave red mouth. I powdered under my eyes, and darkened my lashes with mascara.

The cafeteria was noisy, as always. The plant had staggered lunch hours, and the first set was eating, talking, smoking at the tables. I looked around for an empty table.

A man called, "Miss Whittaker! Miss Whittaker!"

I turned. Surprise pricked me. For a moment, I almost forgot my misery. Claude Lallingham, the English boy who had talked to me when he visited the plant. Whatever was he doing here?

He was standing at a table, waving. "I don't dare leave it," he shouted, "or we'll lose it."

I went to him, smiling. "Hello! This is a surprise!"

"I had to start sitting here early," he explained, grinning. "I didn't know what lunch hour you had. They told me I might have to wait until two o'clock!"

"But how—"

"I passed a blind flying test this morning with flags flying!" he said cheerfully. "They're putting the other chaps through it now and I'm free until four."

It was a shock to me to realize how eager he had been to catch me. A shock, but flattering. Just one thing my sick heart and bruised ego needed at this moment. Gratefully, I smiled at him. "It's nice to see you."

His fair face lighted up. His blue eyes shone. "D'you really mean it? I couldn't help thinking of you so often, after our little talk. I've been bloody lonesome. And

you were so kind to me. I haven't forgotten that."

"Have you eaten?" I asked.

"Just coffee, to keep my equity in the table."

I wasn't hungry. But when he asked me what I wanted, I said, "Whatever you want."

"I'm very partial to American steaks." He came back with a loaded tray. I gasped.

"That looks as if two laborers with a very hard morning behind them were getting ready to dig in," I laughed.

"I did have a hard morning," he said. "I never can tell, with that hood over my head, if I'm in a spin, or heading for a mountain peak. It's instinct, you know, to trust the seat of your pants." He blushed. "That's our American instructor's phrase for it."

"I've always wanted to learn to fly," I said, wistfully. "It seems strange, to work in an airplane factory, and know all the ins and outs of engineering production, yet not know how to fly."

"I wish I could teach you," he said. He added, "Sounds cheeky, a student offering. But I'm really good—without the blind flying, I mean. I've had more than five hundred hours. Used to have a little Moth of my own."

"I wish you could teach me, too," I said.

"Perhaps we could borrow a plane. Or rent one. Say, we could! There's a chartering service at the other end of the field that rents little flivvers."

"Oh, you wouldn't have time for that!" I protested. "You must put all your energies into mastering what they're teaching you."

His face clouded. "Yes, that's right," he agreed. "I mustn't forget that it's my duty to finish as soon as possible and go back to get into the scrap we've got on our hands." He picked at a bit of steak, absently. "As Churchill put it, so many owe so much to so few . . . and we're the reinforcements. But war seems far-away when you're here and everything goes along normally. Sunshine. Laughter. No Monas. No Claras . . . "

"Monas? Claras?"

"That's slang for air raid warnings. Mona, for the alert. Clara, for the all clear."

I laughed. "You English are even taking those with a grin, aren't you?"

"Doesn't pay to let them get under your skin, you know. That's what the blighters were hoping we'd do—but we fooled them."

"I saw a play last week that made it awfully clear, how courage and—" My voice trailed off. I saw Bill again, smiling down at Dinah Winters. Had I sent him back to her now?

"It used to be such a jolly good world, before the Jerries mucked it up," he was saying. "My family lived in Cornwall, you know, but I was working in London. I'd fly down for the long week-end. It was such fun. And bank holidays, I'd go down to the river—" His voice was deep with nostalgia.

I forgot about Bill. I wondered how it must be to be half a world away from the country you loved—how it must be to learn a skill so that you could go back and fight for your country? Just as he said, for all that we were building bombers, we were gay and careless and the sun shone and nights brought no black bombers hovering overhead to release death and destruction.

"Tell me more about England." It was good for him, to talk about it. Better than keeping it pent up and troubling.

"Oh, it wasn't really exciting," he said. "Just every day and warm and—perhaps it's all this frightfulness that makes it seem so good, looking back."

"Is your mother in Cornwall?" I asked.

"No. My mother died when I was a little chap."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

He smiled at me. His fair skin, his blue eyes, the light hair which he pushed back in a boyish little gesture, made him seem suddenly very young and vulnerable. "It's all right. I got used to it so long ago. There were three of us, you know. John and Charles and I. And Father. Father's in the Air Ministry now. Charles—" his voice faltered for a moment, "Charles got his over the Channel, during Dunkerque. John's with General Wavell, in the East."

"Oh."

"So there's nothing much to go back to—I mean, it isn't the way it used to be, at home. Even after the war, it won't be." He shook himself free of that. "But I must be boring you. And I meant to be so entertaining! I wanted you to like me, you see."

"But I do like you, Mr. Lallingham. Or have you a rank? I mean, Lieutenant, or something?"

"Yes, I have a rank," he said. "Not much, but a bit. Only—won't you call me Claude?"

"Claude." I smiled at him, my eyes, for some idiotic reason, stinging suddenly. "Sure, I'll call you Claude." I had a swift realization of how lonely he must have been, how lost and unhappy in this strange land where the people went serenely on their way, while his own people were being bombed.

"May I call you Lenore?" His blue eyes pleaded. "It's a beautiful name. Almost—almost English."

"Of course you may!"

When he went to get us coffee, I noticed Hilda Marshall at a table a few feet away. Her black eyes were interested, and she had been craning her neck.

It probably wasn't any secret, I thought bitterly, that I was in love with Bill Allton. I must have been pretty transparent about it—Corry had known it, so why shouldn't Hilda, with her sharp eyes? Was she wondering what I was doing lunching with this English flyer? Let her wonder!

Claude brought back elaborate pastries, too.

"But I don't dare eat any! They're dreadfully fattening!"

"Nonsense! You couldn't possibly get fat."

"Oh, yes, I could."

"Your figure is—" He stopped. Again his fair skin grew that bright pink. "You're beautiful," he said.

"Thank you, kind sir. I know that merely means you haven't seen some of our more spectacular glamour girls. Like—like Dinah Winters."

"Dinah Winters? Oh, yes. Always getting her picture in the paper? Seems to me she's the girl our Commander met at some Bundles for Britain dinner."

"She gets around," I said.

"She isn't half as beautiful as you are. I always think that more or less professional beauties are too calculated. I prefer the genuine."

"You're very flattering."

"I'm perfectly sincere," he said. He had a little manner that in another man might be almost formal, but I found it charming.

Hilda Marshall got up. "Mercy!" I cried. "It must be awfully late!" She had come in after we did.

"May I see you again?" Claude asked wistfully.

"I'd like it," I said simply. I didn't know how long Bill was going to stay on the West Coast, and going out with Claude would keep me busy—keep my mind off Bill.

I scribbled my address and phone number on a piece of paper napkin. "May I phone tonight?"

"Yes. We'll see a movie, or something."

That afternoon, Corry came into the office. "With Bill away, I know you haven't got a thing to do tonight!"

"That's where you're wrong, smartie! I've got a date."

His jaw dropped. "Really?"

"Yes, really!" I patted his shoulder. "I forgot all about your asking me when I made it, Corry."

"Bill forgot about you, and you forgot about me," he said wryly. "That about sums it up, doesn't it?"

But it wasn't like that at all. The truth was, I knew, I shrank from seeing too much of Corry, because he knew how I felt about Bill. He pitied me, and I couldn't bear to be pitied. With Claude, there was none of this dark undercurrent.

But I wasn't prepared to have quite the wonderful time with Claude that I did, that night. He called for me at eight o'clock. He spread ten one-dollar bills on my little bridge table and said, solemnly, "This is what we can spend. What do you suggest?"

"I think you're crazy! The movies are only forty cents apiece!"

"Must we go to a movie? I saw a fascinating penny arcade—sort of place I never saw in London—where you shoot an anti-aircraft gun at a Jerry for five cents a clip. And they've frankfurters—dogs, you call them, don't you?—and we could have our pictures made in an automatic machine."

I laughed. "All right, Claude."

We shot down phantom planes on a screen until we had an admiring gallery of three sailors and a marine. We ate hot dogs. We had our fortunes told. Mine said I was going to marry a foreigner and have five children. I didn't want to show it to Claude, but he insisted. I held it up over my head. "No."

"You wouldn't want me to scuffle for it?"

"But, Claude, it's so silly!"

"Please. Here's mine. Aren't you interested?"

His fortune said that he was going to sail away into danger. "*But happiness awaits you if you are careful. You will marry a home-loving girl with blue eyes and have a large family.*"

"Blue eyes, eh?" he said, looking at me. "Almost got it that time. What color are yours?"

"They change."

"Large family. And yours says five children. That jibes."

"I think you're silly."

"But am I a foreigner?" he asked, wrinkling his brow in mock concentration. "Am I?"

"No."

"Let's have our pictures taken." But he had slipped the foolish fortune into his pocket, and he wouldn't give it back to me.

"Some day," he said, "I'll return it. With a letter on the back." I guessed that he meant he'd send it back to me when he left for England.

But I pushed all serious thoughts away as we slipped into the little lighted cubicle of the machine which took the pictures. Laughing, we turned our heads at each click. The result, shot out of a slot two minutes later, was a strip of pictures that made me look slightly inebriated. Claude looked astonished.

"Take a strip by yourself," he said. "I'd like to have those."

"If you'll take one by yourself."

This time they came out better. The ones of me showed a heart-shaped face with big eyes and a soft dark mouth. Claude's were nice—the clean line of his jaw, his light hair just a little tumbled, his eyes direct.

Then we slipped into a late movie. It was about an American flyer and an English girl. "You picked it on purpose," I accused him.

"So I did," he admitted.

At my door, saying goodnight, he took my hand. "I've never had such a wonderful time in my life," he said. "There's an awful lot of that ten dollars still left. Will you let me come tomorrow night?"

"I had a good time, too," I admitted. "Of course you can come tomorrow night."

CORRY was indignant the next morning. "Are you going to let that English bird monopolize you, Lenore?"

"Remember Anglo-American cordiality," I smiled.

"Remember charity begins at home."

"This isn't charity. I like Claude."

"Maybe anything's better than batting your head against a stone wall," he said, queerly.

On Wednesday, I had to turn Claude down. "I've got stockings to wash, and my hair, and a thousand things around the apartment, Claude. Honestly."

"I'll phone you, then. Do you mind?"

"No."

We had a silly, laughing conversation. I had my hair done up in a towel, and Claude said he'd like to come over and show me how to wrap a genuine Indian turban.

"No tricks, my man," I replied, severely. "There's a mountain of things to be rinsed out and some ironing."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"We'll see!"

"But I must know, for I've got to borrow some money."

"Don't! We can do something that doesn't cost anything!" And then, of course, I was hooked.

On Friday, Bill phoned long distance. I spoke to him calmly, about business, even though my heart dived and the palms of my hands were damp. After we had run through the accumulated details and I had taken down the messages for the president and for the engineers, I asked, "When will you be back?"

"Another week, at least," he said.

I wanted to say, "Oh, Bill, I'm sorry! Bill, come back soon! I didn't mean it, that night . . ." Instead, I said carefully, "I see. Is there anything else?"

There was a pause. My heart beat frantically. The telephone slipped in my fingers. I adjusted it. At last, as if from a long way off, Bill said slowly, "No. No, nothing else. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

But how could I have known how irrevocable, how final a farewell that was? How could I have known, then, that Dinah Winters already had been in San Diego for two days?

The telephone rang again, almost the moment I hung up. It was Corry.

"Bill just phoned," I said. "He'll be gone another week."

"That's fine! Now I can take you skiing Sunday! Or are you all dated up with that English cousin of yours?"

"They've some kind of maneuver this Sunday," I said. "Aren't you glad?"

## *Chapter Five*

WE HAD a marvellous time that Sunday. I had bought a skiing costume, and skis—all the things I had expected to buy with Bill Allton at my side. The things I had expected to wear for Bill's eyes. But that didn't matter; it was only a vaguely troubling thought as I dressed that morning. Then Corry came, and we were off to the ski train.

The crowd on the train was happy-go-lucky and boisterous. Someone had a bottle, and someone else had a guitar. They sang, and Corry and I sang with them. Then, at eleven, we were in the crisp, cold air of the mountains. We were getting our skis out of the baggage car, setting off on the long path that would lead to the ski elevator and the top of the white hill.

"I'm sure I'll break my neck," I laughed, as Corry fastened on my skis. "Heavens, what's this little wheel on a pole for?"

"You're holding it the wrong way! It's to anchor you in the snow."

"Gravity will anchor me."

"Now you do exactly as I say. Look, here's a bunch of beginners. Come on, move your feet. Move your feet!"

"How can I with a horizontal *tree* strapped on each one?"

"Lenore, you're hopeless!"

But it was fun, with his strong hands holding me up and his eyes laughing and the crisp, invigorating air snapping at my cheeks and feeling so clean and fresh in my lungs. It was fun, after a while, when I got the hang of it, to slide a few feet under my own power—actually upright, my skis staying neatly parallel instead of crossing ridiculously.

Two hours of that, and occasional tumbles in the powdery snow, and we were ravenously hungry. There was a tavern where we ate enormous hot sandwiches and drank chocolate. From the conversation around the long tables, I realized that most of these city people were beginners like myself. That lent me confidence.

Afterward, I was quite daring. "Let's go down that big hill, Corry."

"There's a bend at the bottom of it. You might go haywire."

"Oh, don't be such a fraidy cat! Come on!"

It was delightful beyond words to feel the wind whishing past me. My hair blew straight back under the little felt Dutch cap. My chin was almost frozen, but my fingers in the warm rabbit fur mittens were like toast. Corry had bought me a pair of sunglasses to cut down the snow glare. It was an exultant, free, wild sensation, this skimming over the crusty snow—this speed, this sudden ease which filled me with a sense of power.

"Corry, Corry, it's almost like flying!"

"Hey, watch it! The bend! THE BEND!"

Half a moment later, my skis simply wouldn't turn in that expert and effortless way they were supposed to, and I was being catapulted over the path made by the skiers who had gone before. Then I was down, a tangled heap of skis and arms and legs.

"Are you hurt?" Corry asked breathlessly, bending over me.

"No, I'm all right." I dragged him down beside me. "Oh, Corry, this is such fun!" I laughed and laughed. Corry collapsed, laughing beside me. "I thought I was so good! I thought I'd be slaloming and Christying and doing all kinds of stunts in another half hour."

He put his arm around me. With his free hand, he dusted the snow off my face and hat. "You're a good sport, Lenore. Really, you weren't doing badly at all."

"I'm terrible. But I've got some breath left. Let's start all over. Maybe this time I'll navigate the curve."

It was fun to be carried up in the little dingus towed by a cable. You had to hang on, or you'd be dropped ignominiously into the snow. Our skis were strapped up ahead, and Corry was hanging on beside me.

But again, after the singing wonder of skimming over the snow, the curve defeated me. I went down head first, this time, with my skis flying up into the air as a shower of snow and ice sprayed up behind me.

"Lenore!" Corry cried. "Lenore, that's enough! Next time, you'll break your neck."

I rolled over on my stomach, resignedly.

"Take the skis off, Corry. I'm a flop."

"You certainly are—in the strictly verbal sense," he laughed. "But you look so lovely in the snow! Your cheeks are pink, and your eyes sparkle like blue diamonds, and Lenore—Lenore, I—I'm crazy about you."

"You're crazy," I said. "Take off the skis, please."

He mustn't talk to me like this. Because I didn't love him. I couldn't. For me there was only Bill. Bill, who would be coming back from the West Coast soon—and we could start all over, we must—this coldness, this sense of strain between us mustn't go on. I remembered his voice on the long distance phone, *"That's all, Miss Whittaker."* Oh, no—that wasn't all! There had to be more for us—there had to be!

But it was on the train that I discovered, agonizedly, there'd never be more. For as we found our seats and settled down for the long ride back, a newsman came through the car. "Sunday papers—Sunday papers."

There hadn't been time to look at a paper this morning. Corry bought a paper. He divided it up, keeping the funnies for himself and handing me the news and society pages. Suddenly, as I looked over the headlines, Dinah Winters' face leaped up at me. "Another picture!" I thought. "She probably has a publicity agent." But then the words under the picture were making sense—and there was Bill's name, staring at me. *"Mr. William Allton, who is connected with Air Transports."*

I went back, my heart racing, to read the whole of it. *"Miss Dinah Winters, often called number one debutante, was married yesterday to Mr. William Allton, who is connected with Air Transports, in a surprise ceremony at Las Vegas, Nevada. The couple flew to Las Vegas from San Diego, California."*

"Corry!" I choked. "Corry!" The paper was rattling in my hands, and suddenly my voice died. I could only point to the picture, to that dreadful caption.

Corry took the paper from me. His eyes hardened as he read, and a bunch of muscles at his jaw twitched.

He let the paper fall from his hands. Someone behind us was singing, raucously, and outside the window, the snow-covered countryside was shining through the early winter twilight. My eyes were set in sockets of hot sand. I turned my head still farther away from Corry.

"Lenore," he said at last. "Lenore, don't—don't take it like this." His hand sought mine. The touch of his fingers was strong and solid. "It was in the cards, Len. Bill—Bill's always been that way. Turning down what was under his nose, and chasing the glitter. . . ." His voice died. "I should have told you. I've known Bill for years. He's my best friend. But in some ways, he's a heel."

"You mean—you mean he wouldn't have married me anyway?" I asked dully. "That's what you mean, isn't it? I wasn't good enough. Bill had to have a girl with money or a social family or—or something that glittered. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes," Corry admitted, "that's what I mean."

I bit my lip. "You're wrong. You—you shouldn't talk that way about Bill. He—he had a right to choose what he wanted. Just because I loved him didn't mean he *had* to love me." I lifted my chin. I must hold my head high, I must master this treacherous pain inside me.

But my heart was weeping wildly inside me. No more hope. Now I could never dream that I could get him back. Now I had no chance ever of making up for that moment in my apartment when I had drawn away from him, when I had said, "No, Bill. We mustn't."

If only I hadn't been such a fool! He'd have been mine, now! He loved me. He had told me he loved me. He hadn't been lying. Oh, no, not then—the look in his eyes, the way his mouth had drank mine. No, that was no lie. He had loved me, but I had been afraid—and he had said, mockingly, "A girl can't be too careful!" And then he had turned to Dinah Winters. She'd flown to the West Coast after him. She wasn't ashamed to bare her heart. She had been open and candid about her love. I saw again her red mouth, her bold, long eyes. She wasn't afraid of anything! And now, she was his wife.

Corry was watching me, his eyes shadowed, his face grim.

I tried to smile. "I'm all right, Corry. This—this won't kill me." And then I tore out, "Oh, please, stop *pitying* me! That's the one thing I can't bear!"

Corry's hand released mine. He stood up. "I think I'll go into the smoking car, Lenore," he said. He was giving me a chance to get hold of myself. Giving me a chance to save my pride, to force myself to down the pain inside me, the quivering of my mouth.

I'LL never forget that long, long agony—sitting there, with the train so slow, and home and the refuge of my small apartment miles away. Never forget how, after Corry came back from the smoking car, I still couldn't trust my voice. And he said, "There's a poker game down in front. Let's join them."

So we joined, and I held the cards in hands that were steady now, and made my bets in a tight little voice. I didn't know whether I was winning or losing. It didn't matter. The most important stake in my life had been lost the day Bill Allton married Dinah Winters, and now I didn't care what happened to me.

At last we reached the city. Corry put me into a cab. With rare understanding he said, "I've got something to do here. Do you mind going home alone?" He paid the driver. Then he said, just as he closed the door, "Don't come into the office tomorrow, Lenore. I'll tell them you're under the weather."

The moment the driver pulled away from the curb, the hot, anguished tears broke. All control was gone. I was crying bitterly, alone on the back seat.

I couldn't sleep that night. I couldn't even lie still. And with the dawn, I got up to wander the streets. I had lost Bill. He had married Dinah. I wanted to die. But you can't die as simply as that. Life goes on—you've got to go on. Once I even walked down to West Street and stared at the oily river. But I knew I wouldn't jump. Wounded as I was, I still wasn't mad enough for that. At last I turned back. I was weary, tired to my bones. Perhaps I'd sleep now.

The telephone was ringing as I came into the apartment. I didn't want to answer it. Corry. Corry to ask me how I felt. Corry to pity me some more. If only I had been more clever about masking my heart! Pain, I thought bitterly, is so much easier to bear if no one knows you're suffering!

The telephone kept shrilling. At last I picked it up.

"Lenore?" It wasn't Corry, but Claude Lallingham. "Lenore, they told me in the lunchroom that you were ill today."

"It's all right. Just—just a headache."

"I was worried," he said. It was sweet to know someone cared. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Oh, no. I'll be all right tomorrow."

"Sure, Lenore?"

"Quite sure. It was nice of you to call."

"Have you had a doctor?"

"I don't need a doctor, really. Just a headache. It's nothing."

"Will I see you tomorrow, then?"

"Oh, yes. I'll be in!"

I hung up feeling somehow heartened. Why should Corry's concern make me wince, when Claude's did not? But of course it was because Corry knew—because he pitied me. Claude didn't know. With him, my armor was perfect.

Half an hour later, the doorbell rang. It was a boy with flowers. They were long-stemmed roses, and there was a note from Claude. I smiled, burying my nose in the blooms. Roses! I hadn't had flowers from anyone since the time I went to a prom, in high school.

When I returned to work, next morning, the plant was ringing with the news of Bill's marriage. Hilda Marshall told me, "You ought to get up a collection from all the engineers and girls for a wedding present." We always did that when anyone married. But I couldn't bear it.

"Hilda," I said knowing how she loved being the moving spirit of everything, "you do it, will you? I'm no good at that kind of thing. I wouldn't even know what to get."

"Getting a gift for a dame like Dinah Winters is no cinch! Why she's got everything! What could she need?" Already she was considering the possibilities. "Well, silver's always good—even if she sticks it into a closet. I wonder where they'll live. He doesn't make the kind of money her set's used to. Bet they take a penthouse."

"Hilda," I said. "Better get hold of people before they spend all the money they have with them on lunch."

She fled, and I turned to my typewriter with a wry smile.

But even that day wasn't as bad as the morning Bill came back. He was late. I was bending over the mail on his desk, arranging it into folders according to its urgency, when he came in.

"Hello, Lenore."

I jumped. My face crimsoned. I could feel it, spreading down to the gold-shell necklace I wore. "Hello, Mr. Allton. C-congratulations."

"My hand's sore from all the handshaking. I could hardly wade through the well-wishers on my way through the hall."

I couldn't think of anything to say. Mercifully, Hilda Marshall popped in just then. "Happy bridegroom to you!" she sang, at the top of her voice. "The present's so enormous we couldn't carry it in here. It's in Mr. Mittenheimer's office. Come on, Mr. Allton."

She pulled him out. I knew that most of the staff would be in Mr. Mittenheimer's office, but even though I had contributed two dollars to that gift, I didn't want to be there when Bill saw it.

It was an enormous coffee service, with a tray almost as large as a table top. For Dinah Winters, who had everything, only the best and the most sumptuous would do!

But when Bill got back to the office, the first thing he did was phone Dinah.

"Darling, the office has treated us to a regal wedding present. You've simply got to come out here and see it, and thank the folks."

I didn't want to listen, but I couldn't get up and close the door without being very pointed about it.

"You know I still do," he said. "Will I see you at noon then, darling? I can't wait. It seems a million years. And listen, don't drive yourself! You're not safe in a car, you daredevil, you. Make Burns take you."

A moment later, he hung up. "Burns," he said, more to

himself than to me. "My chauffeur. Can you feature it?"

I rushed through my work as the hands of my watch got closer to noon. I didn't want to be in the office when Dinah Winters Allton came in.

But she came early. I heard a stir outside, and the squealing of some of the typists, and then she was standing in the doorway. She wore a turban of mink and golden earrings. Her long eyes were cool, with their lacy dark lashes knowingly blackened. Her red mouth smiled. "Miss Whittaker, I presume? Bill's been telling me about you. If you don't approve of me, it seems our marriage simply isn't legal."

Bill bounced into the office, "Dinah! Darling!"

I turned my eyes away as he kissed her. And then, when she went into his office, I grabbed my handbag and ran.

"I'll have to leave," I thought dizzily, rushing to the cafeteria. "I can't stand seeing her come up there . . ." Once I had dreamed of calling for Bill, as his wife. All the things I had pictured myself as doing, she'd be doing.

Suddenly, I hated her. Hated her in a black and blinding fury of venom that I had never experienced before. If she hadn't taken Bill away from me, I'd be his wife! She had everything! Why did she have to have a young engineer who wasn't even rich, who wasn't even especially handsome? She couldn't love him as I loved him! She couldn't! She was too hard, too selfish!

Claude was waiting for me, at our usual table. I pushed the thought of Dinah out of my mind. "We've been invited to a party," he greeted me. "Big doings at the home of our school commander."

"Swell," I said. "How're you doing with the weather maps?"

"On the beam, now," he smiled. "But they were certainly stymying me for a while!

"There was a night flight, tonight. We're to have them every night this week," he said.

"That'll be cheerful news for Corry," I laughed.

Claude's face sobered. "Lenore, are you really gone on him?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I know he's pretty gone on you . . ." They had met, right here in the lunchroom, last week. Corry had lightly accused Claude of poaching on his territory. "Don't be silly, Claude."

Claude looked hurt but said no more.

"Even if I can't see you any night, we'll be having lunch every day. The other chaps are teasing me about coming way across the field just to eat."

"I should think they would! Tell you what, tomorrow, I'll join you in the beanery."

"It would be nice to get away from the interested eyes of your fellow workers," he laughed. "But I warn you, it'll be just as bad at the beanery. My fellow students are awfully proficient at ragging."

"Sometimes you're so English!"

"Sometimes," he said, his eyes on mine, "you're appallingly American."

## Chapter Six

THAT night, as I was numbly trying to listen to the radio, to forget the sight of Bill Allton kissing Dinah in the office, Corry rang my doorbell.

"Why, Corry! Come in."

He looked stern and tense, as if he were preparing to argue—or fight. "What's the matter? You look so belligerent."

"Lenore, I've been watching you all day. You're jittery as a cat! I—I can't stand it. Listen, Lenore, I—" Suddenly, he grabbed my hands. "Darling, Bill's married, there's no use of you torturing yourself about him. The only way to cut him out entirely is to— Oh, I'm saying it badly, but I can't bear your being hurt! Lenore, will you marry me?"

Stunned, I could only stare at him. At last, I said, slowly, taking my hands away, "You're asking me just because Bill's married? To make it easier to forget him? To save my pride?"

"Oh, no! Lenore, I'm asking you because I love you! I never asked you before—I knew it wouldn't be any use. You couldn't see anybody but Bill."

"But now that he's married, you think I will—to save my pride? Or because you feel sorry for me?"

His voice was ragged. "I love you. That's the only reason I'm asking you. Will you, Lenore?"

"You know I won't," I said steadily. "Oh, Corry, you've been so good to me! Better than I deserve! But I won't marry you without loving you. It wouldn't be fair to you. It would be cheating."

"You'll forget him," he said passionately. "Trust me, darling! I can teach you to love me. After we're married, I'll be so good to you. I'll do everything I can to make you happy. You won't be able to help loving me!"

"That's an awfully one-sided arrangement, Corry," I said in a low voice. "You know I won't do that."

"Why not? Oh, Lenore, it isn't sudden or unexpected! You know I've been mad about you for a long time. I just can't bear your going into that office every day, working with him, after the way he treated you and the way you feel about him!"

"That's it! You want me to quit the office! Listen, Corry, Bill didn't treat me any way. He never asked me to marry him. A few dates didn't mean I had any claim on him." But my voice shook, remembering that Sunday night here in this apartment when I had struggled out of Bill's arms.

"Lenore, please! I love you so! I can't bear the thought of your being unhappy."

"I won't be unhappy. I'll get used to it." My mouth twisted. "We can't all have everything we want, in this life, Corry. Some day I'll be able to walk into the office and none of this will touch me. Some day it'll all be dead."

There was a silence. He sat miserably on the edge of the sofa, his hands raking through his hair.

"Would you like some coffee, Corry?"

"No. Yes. All right."

While I made the coffee, I thought tiredly, "Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe this is the best way to forget Bill." But the madness his kiss had roused in my blood could not die so easily.

Like many another foolish girl before me, I thought that if I waited, perhaps some day my second chance for happiness would come. I remembered the gay, reckless life Dinah Winters had led. I thought, "She won't be a good wife to him. She'll tire of him. After the new wears off, maybe Bill will be unhappy. He'll turn to me then. There may be a chance for us yet. I can't cut myself off forever."

Besides, it wasn't fair to Corry. He thought he'd be satisfied, marrying a girl who didn't love him. But the ecstasy I had known in Bill's arms had taught me wisdom, too. There'd come a time when Corry would want in his wife the fire and the love that it was his right to have. Second best isn't good enough, when a man holds his wife in his arms. Corry deserved better than that. Some day he'd meet a girl who loved him for what he was—not a girl whose heart was torn and bleeding, who turned to him only to save her pride.

I carried the tray with the two coffee cups into the living room and I couldn't help remembering that other night, when I had made coffee. For Bill. The spilled sugar. The way he pulled me into his arms . . .

"Lenore," Corry burst out without touching his coffee. "Lenore, won't you think about it? We'd be happy! I tell you, I know we would! We'd buy a little house in the suburbs. I'd work so hard for you."

"You couldn't work any harder than you work now, Corry. Oh, my dear, I know why you're asking me! It hurts me to hurt you. But, Corry, the truth must always be faced. Marriage isn't just companionship and *liking*. There's more to it— I couldn't bear giving you half a loaf, Corry."

For a moment, his eyes were startled. He stared at me. "Lenore—Lenore, has there been more between you and Bill—"

I flushed scarlet, following his thought.

"Oh, no! No, Corry! You mustn't think—just because I know what marriage ought to be—"

I couldn't go on.

Corry's eyes fell. "I'm sorry," he muttered. "I had no right to leap at that conclusion. Forgive me."

"It's all right."

He said, slowly, "I love you so much that even if—even—" He'd have wanted me anyway, that's what he meant.

My heart swelled with gratefulness. "You're wonderful, Corry. I wish I could love you. I wish I weren't so honest— I wish I could take advantage of you. But I can't. I'm not hard enough."

"No," he agreed, "you're not hard. Maybe if you were, you'd have known how to handle Bill."

When he left, his eyes were defeated. "I wish I could persuade you, Lenore. Because from here on in, it isn't going to be easy. I'd hang around forever if I thought I'd have a chance. But I hate to know you'll be seeing Bill every day."

"Don't you trust me, Corry?" I tried to make it sound light. The try was a miserable failure.

"It isn't you I don't trust!" he cried violently. "It's Bill!"

"You're mad! Bill's crazy about Dinah!"
"He's always crazy about new things," he said queerly. "Until the new wears off."
But I was an old story to Bill, I thought bitterly. Older and infinitely more boring than Dinah could ever be.

IN THE days that followed, Corry kept asking me to marry him; and I kept refusing, until it was so painful for both of us that I told him, "If you don't stop asking me, I'm never going to see you again!"
"If you don't stop refusing me, I'm the one who's never going to see you," he said.
"What do you mean?"
He smiled gently. "Remember, once I told you that a lot of my friends were ferrying bombers to England?"
My heart dived. "Corry, you wouldn't! You couldn't be so reckless!"
"Reckless? It's a good cause. And the pay's tremendous."
"It's so tremendous, because it's so dangerous. Oh, Corry, you can't be so crazy! Corry, no!"
"I've wanted to for a long time," he said. "I was on the point of doing it months ago. Mittenheimer talked me out of it. But, Lenore, I can't take this! I can't bear seeing you white and grim and working with him, while he's happy as a lark. Damn it, sometimes I think he's so selfish he doesn't even know what he's done to you!"
"Corry, he's acting the very best way. As if nothing has happened. If he acted any other way, I couldn't bear it."
"You can't bear it anyway! You've lost weight, and you've got blue rings under your eyes—oh, Lenore, if you'd marry me!"
I didn't answer.
"See?" he said. "I'd better sign up to ferry a few bombers. Give me something to think about."
"But the plant needs you, Corry!"
"I've got three cracker-jack assistants. The old man's still pretty good, remember. The system's in, our production's doubled—no, I'm not as irreplaceable as all that."
"Corry, I won't let you!"
"Marry me, then."
I bit my lip. Corry took my shoulders into his two hands and smiled down at me. "Can't you let me make a fool of myself in my own sweet way, Lenore? I let you. Remember? If I'd a grain of sense, I'd kidnap you and marry you if I had to chloroform you to do it!"
"It's not because I won't marry you!" I accused. "It's because there's a reckless streak in you! You wanted to go before, you know you did, and this is just an excuse!" He'd always worked so hard, never had time for the excitement and adventure that most men dream of. I could understand how tempting it would be to take so dangerous a job—to fly an ocean with enemy bombers looking for you.
"Yes, I wanted to go before," he admitted. "I've wanted to go since they first began ferrying those bombers over. I'm a good pilot, and they need good pilots."
"And you think it would be fun!"
"More fun than watching you breaking your heart over Bill Allton."
But I didn't think Mr. Mittenheimer would let him. He'd talked him out of it once. I looked at Corry's tumbled tawny hair, at his lean jaw—and I patted his hand. "Just wait till the boss hears this insanity!"
I went to the party that Claude's commander was giving for the squadron that night.
Hordes of people were there. It was the most brilliant party I'd ever attended. There were Army and Naval men; there were society women and their husbands; there were debs and even an exiled Duchess.
Claude said, "You look beautiful!" I had bought a new evening gown. My hair was done in a soft coronet of curls. He was splendid in his uniform, with the golden wings on his breast. Air Force Blue dominated the room. The whole squadron was there—clean-looking English boys with their clipped accents, their smiling faces . . . boys who were so soon to fly off to battle.
"I've been brushing up on my dancing," Claude confided. "The other chaps have been threatening to take you away from me, so I made them play the ladies' part while I practiced."
He introduced me, proudly, to his commander, a silver-haired man with keen blue eyes who looked at me appraisingly, and then smiled. "I've heard a great deal about you, Miss Whittaker. I told Lallingham it's unpatriotic, but he pays no attention to his commanding officer."
That surprised me. Claude must have talked of me an awful lot. It made me faintly uneasy. But there was no use pretending I didn't know he was falling in love with me. I wished, unhappily, that I could fall in love with him. I wished that there could be someone else besides Bill for me. Because he was married—married to Dinah Winters.
As I thought her name, I heard it spoken. Claude and I were just dancing by the Duchess and an American Naval Officer. They must have been talking about Dinah, for now the Duchess was laughing. "She was always clever," she was saying, "but not clever enough to fool us all."
I wondered what they meant.
Later, in the powder room, I found myself sitting at a dressing table right next to the one where the Duchess was powdering her nose.
A red-haired girl came in. "Millie!" she cried, falling on the Duchess, "I knew you were supposed to be here, but I've been smothered in RAF lads."
"Hannah!"
They began to talk about another party. I was just picking up my little sequined bag to rejoin Claude, when I heard the Duchess say, "That's one house party Dinah Winters won't drag her brand new husband to! Because David may be there."
"Is there any truth in that old story?" the girl called Hannah asked idly.
"Truth? My dear! Justine Winters would never have remarried a man she tried for years to be rid of if it weren't to protect her precious Dinah!"
"So you really think the baby—"
"At Justine's age! A baby! So fortuitous, that's all I can say! After Dinah has a mad affair with David Blake, Justine suddenly remarries Paul—and presents Dinah with a sister—twenty-two years younger! My dear!"
I was rooted to the spot. I couldn't move. The thing they were saying was so horrible. As if paralyzed, my mind fumbled with the pieces. Justine Winters, Dinah's mother, had been reconciled with her father in a spectacular second marriage about which all the gossip columns had been lyrical—I remembered that. I hadn't known there'd been a baby. Twenty-two years younger than Dinah . . .
Hannah and the Duchess were getting up now, lighted cigarettes in their red-nailed fingers. Laughing, they swept past me as if I were invisible.
Could it be true? I felt sick. Was it possible? Had Bill Allton married a girl who had a baby?
That overheard conversation was a shattering blow. I saw Dinah Winters kissing Bill there in the office. Could she have deceived him so cruelly? Oh, no—it was only gossip! It couldn't be true!
But when I joined Claude again, in the bright lights of the ballroom, my gaiety was forced. That conversation lay like a dead, cold weight inside me. Dinah Winters. Bill's wife. A baby who was supposed to be her sister. It couldn't be true! But it was so plausible! And women like the Duchess—knowing, feline women with poisonous tongues—usually got hold of the secrets behind carefully closed doors.
"What's the matter, Lenore?" Claude asked. "You look so strange!"
"I'm beginning to get a headache," I whispered. It was true enough. The pulse was hammering at my temple. I felt sick to my stomach. "Do you mind if I go outdoors for a moment?"
He said quickly, "I'll go with you, of course!"
I hated to spoil this party for him. But out on the terrace, he insisted that I wasn't spoiling it. "You're what makes an evening a party for me, Lenore," he said. "Look, if you'd like, I'll take you home."
It was still early. The music came to us from inside, and the shuffling sounds of dancing feet. People laughed. There must be a crowd gathering around the buffets which had just been wheeled in.
"We haven't even had a drink," I murmured.
"That doesn't matter! Shall I call a cab?"
"Please," I whispered gratefully. "Oh, Claude, I hate to ruin this evening you've looked forward to for so long!"
"The only thing that matters is you!" He went for my wrap.
In the cab, he said, "You're cold," and drew me close to him. It felt good to feel the solidity of his arms around me. I rested my head on his shoulder. *Bill, Bill, you've been betrayed!*
But I mustn't carry on like this! It wasn't even any of my business. Yet my teeth kept right on chattering, the pounding of my head was almost unbearable.
At my door, Claude asked, "Is there anything I can do?"
"No, nothing. You've been so kind!"
"I'm not going away to leave you wrestling with this thing yourself," he said. "Here, give me your key!"
Inside, he announced, "I'll stay right here until you feel better. If that headache isn't licked soon, I'll call a doctor."
"Claude, I don't need a doctor!"
"Get out of your things and slip into bed. I'll make you some hot tea. Have you aspirin?"
It was sweet to know that someone cared this much. I undressed quickly, slipped into a nightie and robe, and got into bed. Claude came in and tucked the covers high around me. He said, "I've been fooling around with that

gas range. Tea will be ready soon. Maybe a hot water bag on your feet will help."

"It's in the closet."

He pretended not to see the welter of feminine possessions which jammed the closet. He found the hot water bottle, put back the hat box and the beach sandals and the lacy pillow on the shelf. "Ready in a jiffy."

The hot water bag did feel good on my feet. The delicious hot tea with lemon warmed my insides. Claude said, "Now the aspirin, and I'll douse the light." He intended, evidently, to sit in the living room until I fell asleep.

"You're so good to me, Claude," I whispered.

"I want to get you to where you couldn't get along without me," he smiled. Then his eyes changed, "But you'd have to later, wouldn't you? It isn't fair. I—I can't ask that." He was talking more to himself than to me. I saw him straighten his shoulders. He shook the thought away. "Good night, Lenore. If you need anything, call me."

## *Chapter Seven*

WAS it my guilty knowledge about Dinah Winters that made me imagine, the next morning, that Bill looked unhappy and harassed? His temper seemed sharp. He was edgey. Several times he shouted on the telephone.

Claude phoned me to find out if I felt better. "Are you going to be on that phone forever?" Bill snapped.

I hung up hastily.

All that week, it was like that. "I'm only imagining it," I told myself. "Maybe Bill treated me more gently when we were going out together." When he loved me. At least he had loved me a little.

It was Saturday of that week that Hilda Marshall came into my office. "Can you tie Corry Lord?" she shrieked. "He's leaving for Halifax tonight!"

"Halifax?"

"Yes. The boss is raving. Told him he'd get killed. He's going to ferry bombers, you know. Corry told him there was nothing to it—set the automatic pilot, fly nine hours, and there you are, in England."

"I didn't think he'd do it," I murmurmed.

Hilda looked at me shrewdly. "You and Helen of Troy," she said. "First it's Bill, then it's that English kid—and off and on it's Corry. How do you do it?"

I brushed past her into the corridor. I was going to Corry's office at the other end of the plant.

He was sitting amid a welter of opened desk drawers. There was heaped-up junk on his desk.

"Corry! Oh, Corry, you can't do this!"

"I've signed up, kid." His grin was cheerful. "Don't tell me you've come with a last minute pardon? Will you marry me?"

I sat down hard on a chair by his desk. Tears stung my eyes. "Corry, be sensible! This plant needs you."

"You don't need me. That's what counts with me." Then he sobered. He leaned toward me, his eyes direct and steady. "Look, kid. Even if you suddenly had a brainstorm and wanted me to stay—as Mr. Your Husband—I'd go now. It's something I've wanted to do—something that's gotten hold of me—maybe it was always in the cards."

"Oh, Corry!" Suddenly I realized that two of my friends were pledged to the war across the sea. Claude, and now Corry.

"Tell you what you can do, Lenore. You can ride to the airport with me tonight."

It was no use. I couldn't stop him now. I went out blindly. The world was still a blur, five hours later, when Corry and I got out of the cab at the airport. He had only a light Gladstone bag. "All I'll need," he grinned.

He flipped an extra half-dollar to the cab driver. "Come on, Lenore."

We hadn't much time. Corry had wanted it that way. Already the great silver liner that was to take him to Canada was warming her engines on the apron.

I clung to him. "Be careful, Corry!"

"Don't cry, Lenore. It's not really dangerous. I'll get leaves, you know. I'll be seeing you."

We went through the gate, out to where a blonde stewardess was checking passengers' names against the list on her board.

"Corry, kiss me."

His arms were hard around me. "Lenore!" His mouth came down on mine. There was love and a kind of renunciation in his kiss. Afterward, as we drew apart, he said queerly, "That's the first time I've kissed you, kid. The first time."

"Oh, stay, Corry! Stay and—and I'll marry you!"

It tore my heart out to see him go flying off to danger. To a war where machine-gun bullets spattered in deadly fusillades from streaking planes.

"Too late," he said, with twisted lips. As if he couldn't help it, he gathered me up into his arms again. "Another kiss," he said. "That makes first—and last."

Five minutes later, I was standing in the white glare of the floodlights, waving and trying to smile bravely as the silver plane took off into the night.

"DAMN fool!" Bill said, Monday morning. I knew Corry had spent that last Saturday afternoon with him.

"At that, though, I wouldn't mind going with him," he added.

"Why should you want—" I hit my lip.

He gave me a swift glance. "The bridegroom," he said, almost mockingly.

I was sure there was trouble between Bill and Dinah a few days later, when she came tearing into the office.

"Is my husband here?"

"He's somewhere around the plant, I don't know just where."

She flicked me with her long eyes. "I'll wait."

She sat in his office, smoking one cigarette after another. At last I asked the telephone operator to locate him through the intercom.

The phone rang, then, and Bill said, "Yes, what is it?"

"Mrs. Allton is here."

"Oh. Er. Put her on—on the phone in my office."

I said, "Will you use the other phone, Mrs. Allton, please?" I got up and closed the door so that she could speak in privacy. She wasn't there long. She flung the door open only a few moments later. Color played in her cheeks, and her mouth was set. Without a word, she strode out of the office.

I stood at the window, then, and watched her get into a long dark roadster. She drove off very fast.

It was that night I told Claude about Corry. "And I suppose you'll be going away soon, too, won't you?"

"In six weeks," he said.

"Oh, Claude, I wish you didn't have to!" But that was silly. Of course he had to go. He had come to the United States only to perfect his skill in flying.

"Will you miss me?"

"You know I will!"

"Not half as much as I'll miss you," he said quietly. "This has been an interlude for me—like a bit of heaven. Like a glimpse of the kind of life I might have had if there'd never been a war."

"But then you wouldn't have come here, Claude."

"People always meet, if it were meant for them to meet."

I dropped my eyes against the look in his gray ones.

I've looked hack on the next weeks often. It was during those weeks that Bill's unhappiness grew so obvious that even the girls in the office noticed it.

Hilda Marshall said, "I hope Dinah's not potting him with that wonderful silver coffee set we gave them!"

And it was during those weeks that Claude looked at me with a certain expression in his eyes I couldn't understand. There was something steady, tense, terribly in earnest about his look. As if he wanted to remember my face, as if he were printing it on his inner eyes. But he never tried to make love to me. In fact, he was almost formal at times. Careful not to touch me. And several times he said, "I'd rather not dance, if you don't mind."

It puzzled me. Until the night he broke out, "Lenore, perhaps we shouldn't see each other so much. I've only three weeks left. I've got to get used to doing without you."

Then I understood.

"Claude," I said gently, "it'll be hard enough when it comes. Let's make the most of these three weeks. Let's pretend there's no future after the present. Let's have the best time we can—and laugh, and dance, and store up memories."

"It isn't fair to you," he said tightly. "Lenore, I—I can't hold you in my arms and not want—"

"Don't say it," I pleaded. "It'll be so much easier if we just pretend."

But Claude said, quietly, "It wouldn't be cricket."

I respected him for that. He was thinking of me. Other boys in the squadron were making the most of the time they had left—some of them, I knew, selfishly and callously. But I thought, "I won't be hurt when Claude goes. I like him, but it's Bill I love. It won't hurt me to be kind to him, to give him something warm and happy before he faces war." Only I couldn't say that.

"All right, Claude. We—we won't see each other so much, if that's the way you want it."

But it was that decision which gave me the time to think of Bill. It was that decision which was responsible for the fact that I was at home the night Bill rang my bell, at ten o'clock.

"Why, Bill! What are you doing here?"

His face was gray. His eyes were burning. "I had a quarrel with Dinah," he said thickly. "I tried to get drunk. It was no good. Oh, Lenore, I had to see you! I just had to!"

"You shouldn't have come here!"

"Don't turn me away, Lenore. Please. I've got to talk to you."

Silently, I led the way into the living room. He sank down on the sofa wearily. He twisted his hat in his hands. "I made a terrible mistake. I shouldn't have married her. We haven't been married two months—but already—"

"What happened, Bill?"

He looked at me with those burning eyes. I saw how lean his cheeks were—almost hollow. "I knew she wasn't a lily white angel when I married her," he said bitterly. "A girl like that, who's led the kind of life she led—it wasn't in the cards. But I didn't think there was anyone else she—" He couldn't go on.

I waited, wordlessly. Pity for him welled up inside me, and hatred for Dinah, because she had hurt him like this. He had always been so sure of himself, so armored and invincible!

"I caught her with him, one night when I'd been working late," he said hoarsely. "David Blake. I heard him tell her he'd never let her go." He drew his hand across his eyes. "She was in his arms."

There was nothing I could say. David Blake. The man that Duchess at the party had talked of. With a sharp twinge of foreboding, I wondered if Bill knew about the child.

"I was a fool," he was saying. "I knew you loved me. Why couldn't I have appreciated that then?"

"Bill," I said steadily. "You love her still. If you didn't it wouldn't hurt you so much."

"No," he said harshly. "No, we'll be divorced. I told her that tonight. She keeps seeing him. She says she won't—and then I catch her at it again."

Why hadn't she married David Blake, I wondered? She must love him, to keep seeing him.

"I'll make some coffee, Bill."

He grinned at me—a lopsided grin, a bitter travesty of the old smile. "That'll be swell, Lenore. I knew I'd feel better if I could spill it to you."

He stayed until almost two in the morning. "Lenore, after Dinah and I are divorced, will you marry me?"

"Don't be silly, Bill!" It hurt me to say that, but I had to. "You're not going to divorce her! Most couples have quarrels in the beginning. It's nothing."

"Not like this," he said tightly. He got up, and took my hand. "It's going to be you and me again, honey. I should have known long ago. I'd never have messed up my life like this. But we won't talk about it now. I guess I've got a nerve, after the way I treated you. . . . But I'll make that up to you, Lenore. I swear I will!"

Only a woman who has loved a man and lost him—and then, miraculously, gotten him back again can understand how I felt.

I was tempted unbearably when Bill asked me to go out with him. It wouldn't be right to go, I knew that. He was still married to Dinah. But he had moved his things back to the apartment he had shared with Corry, as the lease had not yet run out on it and all the furniture was still there. And Bill begged me so. "I'll go crazy by myself there! Please!"

I refused twice. Each time he came to the apartment. In the end, I let him take me out. But as we danced in a nightclub, the touch of his hands on my flesh, the feeling that rose inside me with his nearness warned me.

"We mustn't do this any more, Bill," I said at my door. "I—I'm not strong enough. Neither of us is."

"But I'm free now."

"No, you're not. Not yet."

"Oh, Lenore, don't torture me!"

"Bill, it's too dangerous." I remembered the night when I had struggled out of his arms. Now, having him back, knowing the magic of his tenderness again, I wouldn't be able to tear away from him.

As if he read my thoughts, Bill said, "That night—if only you hadn't—"

"Don't."

"We'd have married next day."

"Bill, please!"

"I love you."

"You're her husband." And something inside me screamed that two people weren't through with marriage as swiftly as Dinah and Bill had washed up theirs. Even if he knew about the child. But did he? I couldn't ask him.

## *Chapter Eight*

I DIDN'T sleep that night. I knew I mustn't go out with Bill again.

In the morning, there was a letter from Corry. He had made his first trip. He sent the letter by Clipper. *"I'll be coming back to Canada in a convoy. Don't think I'll be getting leave this early, but as soon as I do, I'll fly down to see you."*

I was standing in the lobby, reading the letter, when Dinah Winters Allton walked in. She was halfway across the lobby, walking swiftly, and just as I saw her, she saw me.

"I've come to speak to you, Miss Whittaker!" she cried lightly. "Where is your apartment?"

Did she know I'd been out with Bill? How could she? She cleared that up immediately. "Since my husband left me, I've engaged a firm of private detectives. You see, Miss Whittaker, it happens that I love my husband."

I put Corry's letter away in my handbag. I followed her to the elevator, opened the door of my apartment. Dinah sat down on the sofa, in the same place where Bill had sat that first night he came to me after their quarrel.

"I want you to leave my husband alone!" she cried suddenly. "You've known him longer than I have, and if he had wanted to marry you, he would have done so before he met me!"

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say.

"Oh, we've been quarrelling—" she said, swiftly. "Bill has—misunderstood—" All at once, her poise broke. Her head went down in her hands, and terrible sobs shook her.

"I never came begging to another woman in my life!" she murmured. "But I'm fighting for Bill, I've got to keep him! He can't leave me like this—he hasn't given me a chance—"

My heart stood still. My mouth was dry, my throat ached. Curiously, a strange pity for her was growing inside me. "He only came to me because I'm an old friend," I managed to say. "He—he was very unhappy."

She lifted her head. Her long tilted eyes were luminous with tears. "What did he say?"

Before I could answer, she rushed on, "He told you about David Blake! About finding me with him!"

"Yes."

"David's been blackmailing me! Because—because—"

"Because of your little sister," I finished.

"How did you know about that?"

"Gossip," I said quietly. "I don't think you ought to pay blackmail. Sooner or later Bill will hear about it."

"I've tried to tell him—"

I loved Bill. Why was I feeling this sympathy for a girl who had always been arrogant—the girl who had taken him away from me? Why should I pity her? She had more than I'd ever have. That's what my mind said. But my heart paid no attention.

"Tell me," she asked nakedly, "are you in love with Bill?"

"You're his wife, Mrs. Allton. I think if you'd be honest with Bill, if you'd try to—to reach an understanding, nothing could ever come between you." It was an evasion, but my feelings were my own. I was doing the most honest thing, no matter how it hurt.

At last she rose. She wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry I had the wrong idea," she said. "You've been very kind. I'll go to Bill. I'll tell him everything."

"Good luck." It cost me a lot to say that. After she was gone, I phoned the office that I wouldn't be in. Then, deliberately, I took a cab to the field and met Claude for lunch at the little beanery.

He was surprised and delighted. He couldn't conceal his delight. "I've missed you."

"It was your idea," I smiled.

"It was rotten, wasn't it?"

I couldn't understand why seeing him again should set my tilting world right once more. But the hurting problems seemed to fade, here at this linoleum-covered counter in the beanery, and I was laughing with Claude as he told me of a joke some of the fellows had played on him.

FINALLY, a man stuck his head in the door. "All out on the field!"

Claude rose. "I've got to be going. May I call for you tonight?"

"Please," I said. Idiotically, my eyes were tear-filled.

That night, he told me, "I couldn't forget you. Even though it isn't cricket, Lenore. You said we could pretend enough in these last weeks to last a lifetime. We had three weeks then. Now we have only two."

My lips quivered. "Two weeks."

"If we were ordinary people in a peaceful world, I—I'd be telling you how much I love you, Lenore."

I couldn't speak. I hadn't wanted him to fall in love with me, but I had known that he did. Two weeks. Claude was so clean and honest—he had been so good to me. Such a perfect companion. So thoughtful a friend. I wanted to repay him for all that. And I had another feeling, the feeling that women must have had ever since time began when men were faced with death in battle—I wanted to send him away happy.

I said, "Tell me, Claude, anyway. I'm listening."

His arms went around me. His face was close to mine. "Darling!" he said. "Darling, do you mean it? Oh, Lenore, I've thought you couldn't feel about me the way I feel about you. It's not—well, for you, the world's not ending. Why should you love a man who must leave you? But you do love me, don't you?" The wonder of it seemed to hold him spellbound. "Darling, you do! Oh, Lenore, since the first moment I saw you, that day I went through the plant—"

He stroked my hair. His fingertips, sensitive and gentle, caressed my face. "Lenore, you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. I—I was thunderstruck, that day. I went away like a man in a daze. I sat in my quarters and saw your face on the wall."

My heart turned over. There was a core of pain inside me. I shouldn't let him pour his heart out this way—not when I didn't love him. But it was little enough to do for a man who was facing what Claude faced. . . .

Then he let me go. His eyes were dark, suddenly. "It isn't fair. I can't do this to you."

"It is fair, Claude," I said gently. "Humans can take only what's given them—we can't ever bargain for the future. Only the moment, that's all we have."

I slipped my hand into his. "Claude, sometimes a man walks down the street, and a brick falls on him. Sometimes you get into a car, and when you turn a corner, another car comes hurtling out of darkness."

"But when you don't know what's ahead—"

"We never know what's ahead, Claude. Look at me. People never know."

"Oh, you're so sweet! I love you so!" Again his arms were around me, again his heart hammered against my own. I thought of Bill. Bill whom Dinah loved. Once I had struggled out of his arms, and sent him to her. Now he was hers, I had no claim on him. Claude was kissing me again. By responding now, by not closing a door in his face as I had closed the door in Bill's, I could cut away the last tie that bound me to Bill. I could free myself, and him.

"Claude," I whispered, "Claude, I—I love you, too!"

But I didn't know that response could well up in me like this. I didn't know that there was a magic which could come with Claude's incredulous joy.

The march of my thoughts stopped, and there was nothing but the beat of my heart, the pounding of the blood in my veins. There were no problems, no reasons—suddenly, wonderfully, Claude's arms were all that mattered. His kiss was lifting me into ecstasy. The fiercely surging emotion between us was conquering everything else, and I knew that something had happened—something I had not bargained for—which made me part of him, and he part of me.

"Claude," I whispered. "Claude, I love you so!" And this time, the cry came from my heart.

## *Chapter Nine*

AFTERWARD, he said soberly, "I had no right. I can't marry you and go off to war."

"You had every right," I said softly. "Let's not spoil it with futile regrets. Oh, Claude, I'm *proud.* Proud and glad!"

"We'll be married. I'll speak to the Commander."

"Must you ask him for—for permission?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Claude, maybe he won't let you."

"He'll give his permission!"

"It won't matter—even if he doesn't. Oh, Claude, I'll wait for you."

He stroked my hair. "It's cruel of me to ask you. I haven't any right to ask you. Maybe I—"

Swiftly, I pressed my hand against his mouth. "Don't say it! Remember those silly fortunes? You'll sail away into danger, but if you're careful, you'll come through. I know you will."

He said, bitterly, "You can't be careful in a war."

"Let's not think about it now. Oh, Claude, let's keep on pretending that we have the rest of our lives."

It was past midnight. But suddenly, I wanted to walk with Claude. "I want to walk in the dark, Claude. In the free world, where there are no bombs."

Together we went through the park. We sat on a bench, and watched the moon in the waters of the lake. We found an all-night diner, and drank coffee and ate hot dogs. Then we walked again, the cold winter air bracing, my hand in Claude's overcoat pocket, his arm around me.

It was dawn when we returned.

"We're probably crazy," I said, "but it was wonderful."

"You're what's wonderful, darling."

"Will you breakfast with me, Mr. Lallingham?"

"I shall be delighted, Mrs. Lallingham."

Mrs. Lallingham. It was like a stab in my heart. "Claude, are you—are you going to ask him?"

"As soon as I can get him alone this morning."

He helped me fix breakfast. "Some day we'll be doing this in our own home, Claude."

"Some day, please God."

"Must we live in England?"

"You'll like it."

"Claude, if they'd let me, I'd go back to England with you." I thought that over, as we ate our breakfast. "After we're married, my place is with you. Maybe there's something I could do to help them, in London."

"I wouldn't let you! The one comfort I have in this insane world is that you're safe."

"No one's ever really safe, Claude."

He smiled into my eyes. "My little philosopher."

It was seven o'clock. "Darling, don't you have to be back?" I asked breathlessly.

"Yes, I must. We've some very important flying to carry out this morning." He got up hastily. "I'll be back by lunchtime. At the plant, then?"

"Yes, of course."

I dreaded seeing Bill again. But I'd need my job, now. The waiting months ahead, while Claude was flying battle planes for England, were real and vivid for me for the first time. If this war went on—it was such a long, cruel war, I might be waiting for years. Something squeezed at my heart. He might be killed! But I mustn't think about that. No man knew his destiny, ever.

Bill wasn't in the office. I was restlessly, curiously uneasy. I couldn't type. I paced back and forth. Each time the phone rang, my heart leaped.

At eleven, Bill called me. At last. His voice sounded thick and queer. So much had happened to me, that I had almost forgotten Dinah Winters Allton, almost forgotten that I had advised her to tell him the truth—everything. But at Bill's first words, I realized that she had—and this monstrous change in Bill's voice was the result.

"I've been out all night," he said. "I can't get drunk! I can't forget. Lenore, I've got to see you! I must talk to you!"

"Bill, you should have come in! The plant's so busy. People are asking for you—there's a pile of work—"

"Never mind that. I—I've had a rip up the back that's enough to kill a man! What does work matter? What does anything matter? Listen to me! I tell you I've been trying to get drunk all night, and the more I drink, the more clearly I remember. Dinah's voice—telling me—"

The seriousness of this hit me, then. No time for appeals to him about his work—no time now to do anything but go to him, as he was asking me. That savage disillusion in his voice—the rasping agony—I had to help him.

"Where are you?"

"At the apartment."

At Corry's apartment. I phoned Hilda Marshall, "Got to go out for a while. Put a stenographer in my office." Then I grabbed a cab.

Bill was a wreck. His head was buried in his hands when I came in the unlocked door. He wore a rumpled dinner coat, with a soiled white shirt. His hair was tumbled, his eyes were blood-shot.

But the most awful thing about him was the new, sharp-bitten gray lines in his face. The hard look of his lips. The snarling smile.

"Bill, what is it? Oh, Bill, sit up!" I'd make him some coffee. I'd help him pull himself together.

"Do you know what she said to me, Lenore?" How harsh his voice was! Almost inhuman! "God, what it does to a man's soul to hear his own wife calmly admitting that she fooled him—that she lied to him—that before he met her, there was someone else—" His voice broke.

"But she wanted to be honest, Bill!" I cried. "She loves you so, she couldn't bear having you think it was something else. Oh, Bill, Dinah loves you!"

"You don't know what she confessed! You don't understand! That sister of hers—the baby her mother had after she went back to her father—"

I bowed my head. "I do know, Bill."

His eyes glittered like a madman's. "How do you know? Oh, God, has the whole world known—and only I, poor fool, been blind?"

"No one knows, Bill! Oh, no! It—it was just that Dinah—told me."

"When did she tell you?"

"When she found out we'd been seeing each other again. Bill, it was killing her! She's been so brave, telling you the truth."

"The truth! Brave!"

There was a silence. Suddenly, Bill laughed. A horrible laugh, with a deep gurgling undertone, as if he were choking. A chill prickled up my spine.

"She wanted to be honest with me! Why couldn't she have told me in the beginning? I trusted her, Len! I idolized her! Now—"

"Stop this!" I got up, stamped my foot. "Pull yourself together! You're too intelligent to be raving like a drunk! Can't you understand Dinah's position? She loved you and she wanted to marry you. She was afraid to tell you. But when you thought there was another man, when you turned to me—she had to! Oh, Bill, have you no pity? Can't you be big about this?"

"Big?" The bitterness of that word! The stark disillusion in his eyes.

"I'm going to make you some coffee. Go in there and take a cold shower. Put on fresh clothes. Then we can talk," I said resolutely.

"It's no use."

"You wanted me to come here! I'm willing to do everything I can to get you straightened out. But, Bill, you can't go at this by blaming Dinah—by hating her, and hurting her, and hurting yourself."

"You're very noble about Dinah," he said slowly. "Since when have you been so fond of her?"

I eyed him steadily, my eyes level and courageous. "She loves you. If you lived a thousand years, you'd never find a woman who loved you more." I meant that too. For the first time I saw the selfishness in Bill's nature. His pride had been hurt—and to Bill that was unforgivable.

"I respect your uncompromising honesty," he said sharply.

Why, he thought I still loved him. He didn't know that Claude and I, together, had found a new world. My heart swelled with the sweet wonder of our miracle. But I had no time for myself. I couldn't tell Bill that now. Nothing mattered but getting him to pull himself together—to look at things more fairly, to remember Dinah. I pushed him along. "A cold shower!"

While he showered, I fixed an enormous breakfast. There was a half-filled bottle of rye on the table. I remembered that sometimes a drink helped that sunken gloom a hangover engenders. When he came out, in fresh clothes, I poured him a drink.

"A hair of the dog that bit you."

Wordlessly, he swallowed it. Then he sat down to the ham and eggs, the toast, the black coffee. I couldn't eat. Bill didn't notice. "It tastes good," he said, in a surprised way. "I haven't had anything to eat since yesterday noon. I'd almost forgotten."

But after the meal was over, after we were back in the living room, he began talking wildly again. He said, "I can't go back to the plant! I want to get away from everything! I never want to see Dinah again."

"Be quiet! Listen to me! You wouldn't be feeling this pain and grief if you really hated Dinah. Dinah. It's only that she's hurt you—only that blow was so bitter! You still love her, Bill! You love her more than ever."

"I don't love her. I never want to see her again."

"You do love her! You may run away from the plant, you may run away from her face, and from everything that reminds you of her—but you'll never escape your love! You take your memories with you, no matter where you go."

He didn't answer.

"Bill, be human! It hurt her so much more to have to tell you about the baby! She has suffered so much for that one mistake! Think what the honeymoon must have been like—and those weeks when David Blake was blackmailing her, and she had to pretend she felt gay and fine. Think of her fear that you'd find out! Oh, Bill, she's been through a hell of her own!"

"I—I didn't think of that," he admitted, slowly.

"All for you! All because she loves you. And now, instead of comforting her, instead of trying to be fair—giving her strength to outlive the past—look at you!"

"But I don't love her any more. I can't go on!"

My fingers bit into his arm. "You can, Bill Allton, and you will! You and Dinah will go on together to the best life two people ever had! Because it will be built on truth. Oh, Bill, just think what it will mean to her—to have you come back, and say you still love her!"

There was a look on his face. A look of exaltation, of a new dawn of understanding.

I sprang to the telephone. I dialled Dinah's number. When I heard her voice, I said, "Wait a moment, please. Mr. Allton wishes to speak to you!" The carolling happiness of my voice was as much for myself as for them.

Then I slipped out, closing the door behind me. It was not my right to hear what Bill said to Dinah in that sacred moment.

On the sidewalk, I looked at my wristwatch. Two o'clock! Oh, Claude, my darling—I forgot you! Forgot that you'd be waiting at a table in the plant cafeteria.

Frantically, I hailed a cab. "Air Transports, please. Hurry!"

## Chapter Ten

I DASHED into the cafeteria. Claude wasn't there. "Have you seen Mr. Lallingham?" I asked the woman behind the steam counter. "The Englishman who waits for me every day?"

Her plump face paled. Her eyes looked at me as if she'd seen a ghost. "Mr. Lallingham?" she whispered.

"What's the matter with you? Surely you remember . . ."

The chef had moved up. His face, too, was queer.

"What's wrong? Why are you all staring at me like that?" I rasped.

The woman whimpered, and put her hand to her mouth. Someone had moved behind me. There was a man's hand on my shoulder.

"Miss Whittaker—oh, Miss Whittaker, ma'am."

I wheeled. "What is it? What's the matter with her?"

"You—you haven't been in your office this morning?"

"Why do you ask?" Blind panic began to shake me. "What's the matter with everybody? Tell me! I—I only asked about Mr. Lallingham!"

The man, who by his uniform I could tell was a maintenance man suggested gently, "Let me take you back to your office."

And just then Hilda Marshall came into the cafeteria. "Someone told me you'd just pulled up in a cab, Lenore!" She took my hands in hers, "Oh, darling, you must be brave! Claude—Claude ground lopped this morning!"

There was a rushing noise in my ears. My breath stopped. I couldn't speak. Blackness gathered before me. I couldn't speak. "You—you don't know what you're saying," I gasped. But no sound came. Not a sound. They only stood there staring at me with their shocked eyes and their slack mouths.

That was when I pitched over. I felt the room sway, and then strong arms were tight around me.

When I came to, I was in Mr. Mittenheimer's office. There was a doctor, and Hilda Marshall's black eyes on my face. Mr. Mittenheimer himself stood a little way off, his eyes pitying.

It all came back to me, like a dark green wave breaking over me. "How is Claude? Was he—was he—?"

Hilda licked her lips. She looked at Mr. Mittenheimer.

"Claude was killed, my dear," he said, with infinite gentleness.

"No man knows—" I had said that myself, to Claude. "We never know what lies before us—" But I hadn't dreamed of anything so cruelly unfair, so unnecessarily tragic. That his life should be snuffed off right here on the field where we had met! That in the height of his happiness, in the glad day when we were to make our last plans to be married—a few short hours after we had known ecstasy and the heights of rapture—Claude should be dead.

"It can't be true! It isn't true!" I screamed. "You're only frightening me! It's not true!"

Vaguely, I can remember Hilda's bundling me into Mr. Mittenheimer's car. I can remember her putting me to bed, in the bed where Claude had once tucked me, and I recall the two little white pills she forced me to swallow.

But all that was unreal beside the actual things I was seeing. Claude's face. His eyes, dancing. I was hearing the sound of his voice, feeling the warmth of his arms. I was remembering the silly fortunes in the penny arcade: *"You'll journey into danger, but if you're careful, you'll come through."*

"That's it, Claude," I moaned. "You weren't careful! Oh, sweet, you were such a superb flyer! You never had even a tiny accident!" Hurrying, eager to see me at lunch, eager to tell me, perhaps, that his commanding officer said it was all right, we could be married with his blessing. And now we'd never be married at all.

Now Claude was cold and dead—a strange grave for Claude, in a strange land—and I was a widow without ever having been a wife.

The pills began to work. I fled toward the floating mists

coming at me. I wanted to be sodden, drugged, unconscious! This pain, so sharp, this agony so tearing would recede in the vapor of coma. If only I never had to wake up again! If only I could sleep on and on—and never wake to face reality.

Only it wasn't coma—it wasn't blessed unconsciousness into which I sank. I was standing on a sunny field, and a silver plane was coming in for a landing. I was running toward it—and then, without slowing, without judging the ground correctly, the shining ship came on too fast. A scream gathered in my throat. "Claude! Claude! Look out!" But the nose went over, the wings were quivering, like an upturned beetle. There was a horrible, rending crash.

"Claude! · Claude!"

I shrieked and woke up.

Corry was smiling at me. "It's all right, Lenore. It's all right, darling."

"Corry . . ." I was still dreaming. What was Corry doing here? His face was so white in the dark room, and his hair looked tumbled. His eyes were red eyes, as Bill's had been this afternoon after his drinking.

*"But you can't be here, Corry.* You're in Canada, flying bombers," I whispered.

"I'm on leave," he said quietly. "I wanted to surprise you. Lenore, I'm thankful I came just when I did! Oh, Lenore, darling, you've been so sick."

Miserably, I told him, "Claude's dead. Do you know Claude's dead?"

"Yes," he said. "He died the day before yesterday."

I tried to sit up. Had I been unconscious so long? There was an itching in my arm. Little holes. Where the hypodermic needle went in.

A white-clad nurse glided into the room. "You'd better go now, Mr. Lord."

"She just woke up. I—I think she's going to be all right."

"Let him stay," I begged. "Please let him stay. I'm afraid."

The nurse seemed relieved. She came and felt my pulse. "A fine picnic we've had with you, young lady."

"Corry, I want to get up! I want to see Claude!"

Gently, he pressed my shoulders back. "It's the middle of the night, Lenore. And—it's too late to see Claude."

So I was never to bid him even the last farewell. Scant, difficult tears burned in my eyes. Corry stroked my hand. "You need me now, darling. All I've ever asked is that you should need me."

"He was so fine, Corry. He—"

"I'd have died in his place, if I could."

But suddenly, a strange feeling took hold in my heart. "No, Claude wouldn't have wanted that. He said—he said one never knew when one's number came up. Corry, he died for his country fully as much as if he'd been machine-gunned from the air. He—he wouldn't have wanted not to take his chance . . ."

"He was brave. Gallant."

I clung to Corry's hand. "I loved him so. But in a way, maybe it was fated to be like this. A moment of happiness in a world gone mad. Corry, maybe—like a shooting star—" I was babbling.

Corry stroked my hair. "Try to sleep, darling."

"I've slept for days! I don't want to be drugged any more. I can take it. I—I'd rather face my facts." Then I said slowly, "Corry, are you going away? Will you leave me? Was it just a short leave?"

"I'm never going away. Not now. The plant asked the British Embassy to send me back. I'm needed so badly. And you need me, darling."

BUT it wasn't then that Corry pressed the love he'd always had for me. It wasn't until weeks later, until my chin was up once more and my eyes courageous, until I was back in the office, taking up my duty as Claude would have wanted me to do, helping my country and his to battle the menace—that Corry spoke to me of love.

Bill was working late in the office. Dinah, a new and radiant Dinah, was waiting in the office. She was checking contracts while she waited! Dinah Winters, the glamour girl of long ago, wanted to help now. She was helpful, and I was grateful.

"Read these over, make sure they're exactly like the ones I copied, Dinah," I said.

That's when Corry stuck his head in. "There's so much help around here, Lenore, I'm sure you can be spared a moment."

"What is it?"

"Something I've wanted to speak to you about for a long time," he said. "Dine with me? If we have to, we can come back to the office."

So in a little restaurant close to the plant, Corry told me, gently, "I want you to marry me, Lenore."

This time he wasn't asking. He was saying, steadily, his clear eyes holding mine, "You love me, darling. It was to me you turned in your deepest trouble. I was the only one who helped. I shudder to think what might have happened to you if I hadn't come home just then."

"I know, Corry. I—it frightens me to remember how I was. I just wasn't holding on. I had given up. Even my body was giving up."

"Darling, when I asked you, you pulled yourself together. That proved something to me. It proved you had faith in what I wanted you to do—faith in my concern for you. Oh, Lenore, we've worked together a long time. Why can't we work together forever?"

He went on, gently, "Nothing will ever touch the feeling you once had for Claude Lallingham. As you said, it was like a shooting star. But our love—mine and yours—is different. This is fine and solid and serene. A mature love. Not so stormy, not so dangerous—but so much more tender. So much more enduring."

"I know what you mean, Corry. Like Bill and Dinah. In the beginning, it was pure rapture. Now it's settled down. Trouble did that. They're working shoulder to shoulder—they've grown up."

In a little rush, I told him, "I never loved Bill. It was infatuation. I was crazy, starved for feeling . . . oh, I don't know—"

"Don't ever speak of it. It's done with. What you felt for Claude—that's not done with. That will endure. It's like music, Lenore. Like a background of tender melody against the deeper symphony of living."

"Springtime," I said, with a catch in my voice. "Springtime—and this is for all the rest of our mortal year."

His eyes lighted with happiness. "Oh, Lenore! Lenore, you've really said yes!"

"I understand now, Corry. I—I always depended on you. When I was so bitterly miserable, before I knew Claude. When things were blackest—always, it's been you I leaned on. You from whom I borrowed strength."

But I couldn't promise to marry him. There was something else I had to tell him. The hell such a secret had made in the lives of Bill Allton and his wife was still too new and raw for me to forget. "Corry, when Claude and I were going to be married, when we learned we loved each other—"

His big hand had covered my lips. Resolutely, but tightly, he shut off words. "I don't want to hear it, Lenore. Whatever you and Claude—you're different now. As you said, grown-up. Springtime is one thing . . . Oh, darling, all of us have secret places of the heart. I can't intrude. It's not my right."

"But, Corry—"

He fiddled with a glass. "Suppose I told you you've told me already? When you were so delirious, darling, as I waited beside your bed . . ."

The hot blood rose in my face.

There was a silence. Then Corry said, happily, "Oh, Lenore, you'll be the most beautiful bride in all the world! Lenore, I'm so happy! While I flew over the ocean, I used to see your face in the instrument board. I used to pretend you were my homing beam—that by riding toward your face, your beckoning smile—I was coming home. I couldn't get lost! I bore a charmed life, because I loved you."

He came around the table, his eyes alight with an incredulous joy, his arms reaching for me.

THE END

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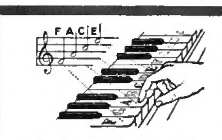
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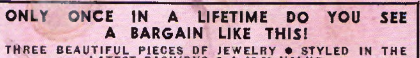
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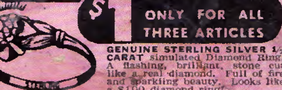
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